

Sussex Archæological Society

AT THE SIGN OF THE BULL, LEWES

BY WALTER H. GODFREY, C.B.E., F.S.A.

The interest of visitors to Lewes has always been engaged by the old gabled house in the High Street, at the top of Bull Lane, both on account of the curious carved figures of Satyrs on its oak corner-posts, and of the inscription that records the residence here of Thomas Paine from 1768 to 1774. Adjoining the house on the west is the entrance to the Westgate (Unitarian) Chapel, flanked by walls formed of stones from the West Gate of the old town wall, which stood at this point until nearly the close of the eighteenth century, and which is commemorated by inscriptions cut on either side of the gateway.

The old house represents all that remains of an inn, with the sign of the "Bull," which stood just within the West Gate, on the south side of the way, and was no doubt used as a hostelry for travellers who entered the town from this direction. In the reign of Elizabeth, Sir Henry Goring, whose brother and nephew represented Lewes in Parliament for a number of years, purchased the property, and appears to have pulled down the southern façade, erecting in its place a stone and flint building which commanded fine views over Southover and towards the Downs. The northern part of the old structure, which is of mediæval date, was preserved and probably for some time continued in use as an inn. In 1698 the whole property was acquired by the Rev. Thomas Barnard and what was left of Goring's house was converted into a chapel, the place being opened for worship on the 5th November, 1700.

We have sufficient material to reconstruct on paper the West Gate, which evidently dated from the 13th century, and was composed of an archway, some ten feet wide between circular-fronted towers each measuring thirty feet across. A complete plan (page 3) of the gate is preserved among the drawings of James Lambert, in the Burrell Collection at the British Museum, and its accuracy is confirmed by the remains of the northern bastion which are preserved in the Freemasons' Hall, and in the house adjoining it on the west. There are also a number of views of the ruined towers before their removal in 1763, when, according to Paul Dunvan, they were pulled down for a wager. The northern bastion was long used as a prison cell by the town.

An outline of the history (as far as it is known) of Bull House has been preserved by Thomas Woolgar (1761-1821), who made an

extensive MS collection of materials for an account of the Borough of Lewes. In his MS volumes entitled *Spicilegia*, at Barbican House¹ he has transcribed a certain number of deeds relating to the property, the first of which informs us that (Sir) Henry Goring of Burton bought it from Thomas Matthew, yeoman, of Lewes in 1583 for £160. It is therein described as "all that messuage or tenement now used for an Inn and now commonly called the Bull, with a small garden or close adjoining on the west, situate and being in the parish of St. Michael's, nigh adjoining unto the West Gate of the said Borough between the walls of the said Borough of Lewes on the part of the West and a small lane there on the part of the East." The transaction is registered in the Feet of Fines 25 Eliz. Trin. where the property is described as "one messuage, one barn, one garden and one rood of land with appurtenances in Lewes. Fine 130 marks of silver." The name of Matthew's wife is given as Johanna. In the *Inquisitio Post Mortem* on Sir Henry Goring's death, certain bequests to his second son Edward are quoted, and among them the following: "I will and bequeathe unto the said Edward Gorenge and to his heirs for ever my messuage house and tenement with the appurtenances in Lewys called the Bull w^{ch}e I bought of one Thomas Mathewe." It is worth noting that the jurors in this document call the building *hospicium* (i.e., inn) and value it at twenty shillings per year.

Thomas Matthew from whom Sir Henry Goring bought the Bull Inn was churchwarden of St. Michael's Church in 1562 and 1565 and gave one of the bells in its round tower. He held the office of Constable of the town in 1560 and 1570. (It was a later Thomas Matthew who founded the almshouses in Keere Street).

Sir Henry Goring died in 1595 and his son Edward did not keep the property long, for the next document cited by Woolgar is its sale by him to Edward Claggett of Portslade in 1612. The house is described as "messuagium et ten^{um} modo vel nuper usitat 'pro hospitio et communiter vocat' le bull," but the consideration is not stated. In 1615 Edward Claggett (now described as of Willingham, in the parish of Ringmer, Haberdasher) sold the Bull to Thomas Oliver of Lewes, merchant, for £325. We may note here that in the valuable MS. of John Rowe,² Steward to Lord Abergavenny, and compiled about 1620, occurs the note: "Thomas Oliver for a tenement called le Bull near the Westgate late Goringes and before Matthews, rent one race of ginger; for the adjoining garden, 3d." In the Lewes Court rolls under date 16th James I (1619) is a grant to Thomas Wells of a parcel of ground of the Lord's waste called the "toun bancke," containing 26 feet in length and 18 feet in width, lying in Keere Street, viz., between the freehold tenement of the aforesaid Thomas and the town wall, excepting

¹ The headquarters of the Sussex Archaeological Society. The first deed quoted is in the author's collection.

² Sussex Record Society Vol. XXXIV, p. 12.

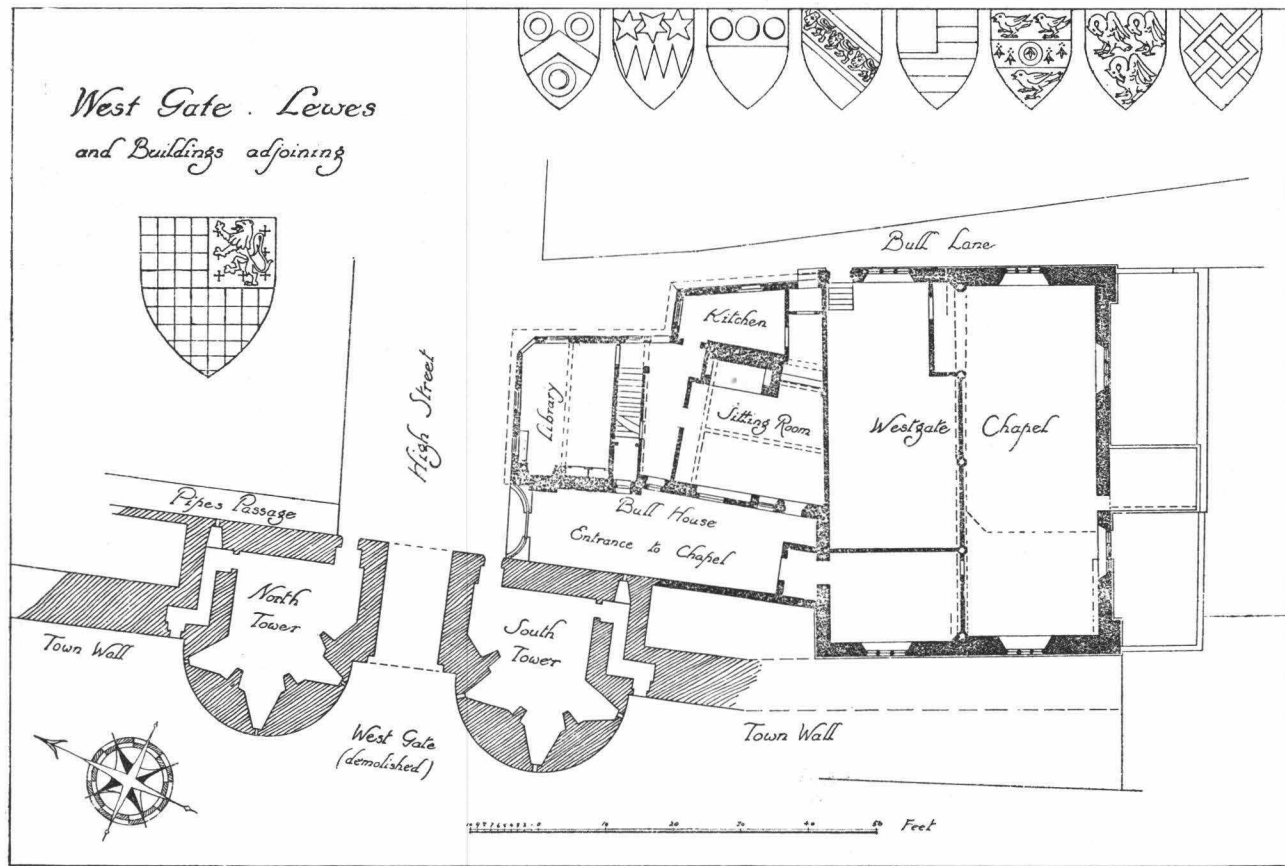


FIG. 1. PLAN OF BULL HOUSE AND THE WESTGATE

The arms above represent the quarters of the Goring family coat: Goring, Dyke, Camoys, Hawtrej, Radmylde, Covert, Pelham, De Courcy

and only reserved to the possessors of the tenement called the Bull the right to erect steps for the use of the said tenement. These steps still exist in Keere Street and are used by the owners of No. 93 High Street. Another reference to the Bull in the Court Rolls is under date 1685, when it was still in the possession of the Oliver family, and relates to the Copyhold property of William Pilbean, namely, a parcel of the Lords' waste lying in the parish of St. Michael upon the bank there, over against his own house and against the inn called the Bull (*Hospitium vocatum le Bull*) and next the Town Wall.

It is clear that in the time of the Commonwealth the Bull was still being used as an inn, for we have a spirited account of a scuffle in one of its rooms between royalists and roundheads. John Pellatt of Arundel, a supporter of Cromwell, was lodging here in 1656 and had words with Colonel Culpepper, who said he could not pay his reckoning because his property had been robbed by the Protector. Culpepper was supported by Henry Woodcock and his brother Francis, who assaulted Pellatt and wounded him "inso-much by effusion of blood running from the said wounds two table-napkins were soaked in blood."¹ In this account the innkeeper's name is given as Richardson, who no doubt was a tenant of the Olivers.

Returning for a moment to the Gorings, we know Sir William Goring of Burton, Sussex, had two sons, Henry and George. The former purchased Bull House, as we have seen, added to it and left it to Edward, who soon disposed of it. George Goring, his brother on the other hand, represented Lewes in Parliament in 1562-3, and built a house here of stone, which cost him £2,000.² He was receiver-general of the Court of Wards and Liveries, and had built himself a country seat at Danny (costing £4,000) before his death in 1594. His son George, who had some difficulty in paying his father's debts, was M.P. for Lewes in 1592-3 and 1601, and dying on February 7, 1601-2, was buried in St. Michael's Church, Lewes.³ His son, Sir George Goring (M.P. for Lewes from 1620-1628, created Baron Goring in 1628 and Earl of Norwich in 1646) was a well-known royalist general, and it was in 1649, when he fled with Charles II to the Continent, that Peter Courthope purchased from his representatives "all that capital message or mansion house lying in the Borough of Lewes sometime the mansion of the said Lord Goring." The documents dealing with this house have been transcribed by Woolgar and we find from its subsequent purchase by Sir Thomas Pelham in 1653 that it can be identified as Pelham House in St. Andrew's Lane, Lewes, a building that was largely

¹ Thurloe State Papers V. p. 779, quoted in S.A.C. XXXIX, pp. 8-10.

² Hatfield MSS. (estimate of the estate of George Goring). Sussex Notes and Queries I. 22.

³ His memorial tablet was removed from the church about 1768, but the alabaster coat-of-arms has now been recovered and replaced.



PLATE I. THE TWO SATYRS



PLATE II. THE ENTRANCE



PLATE III. THE STAIRCASE



PLATE IV. THE FRONT ROOM

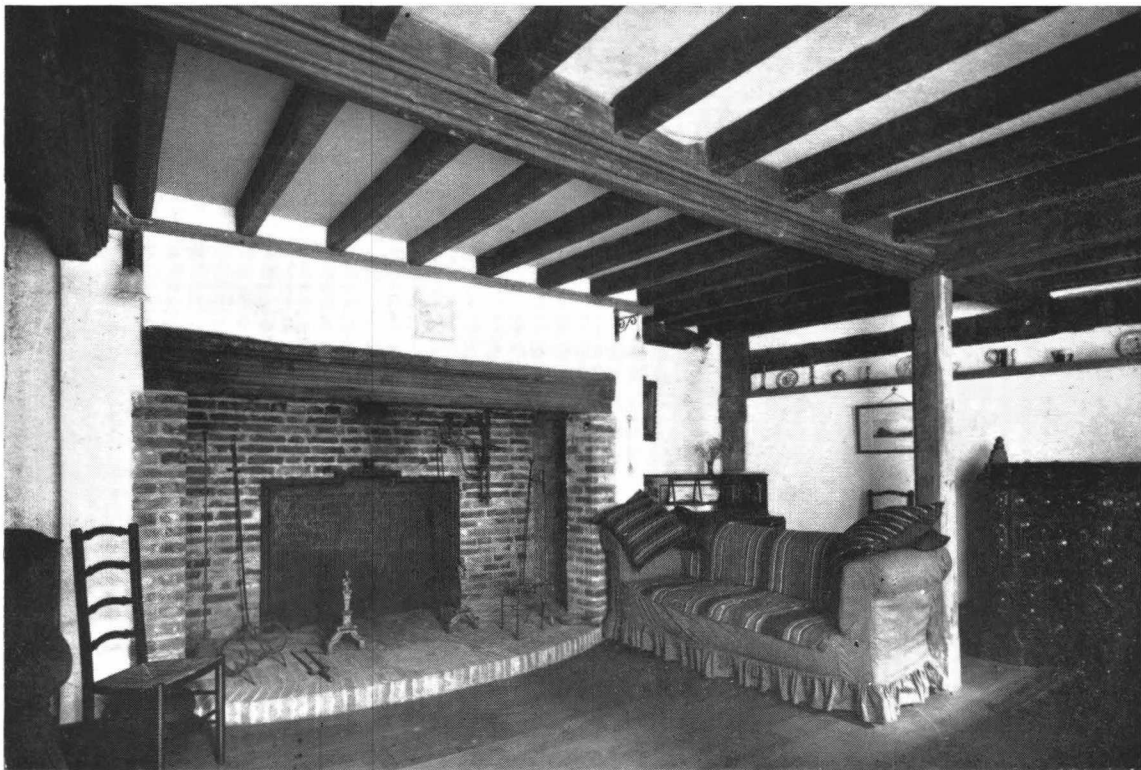


PLATE V. THE LIVING ROOM

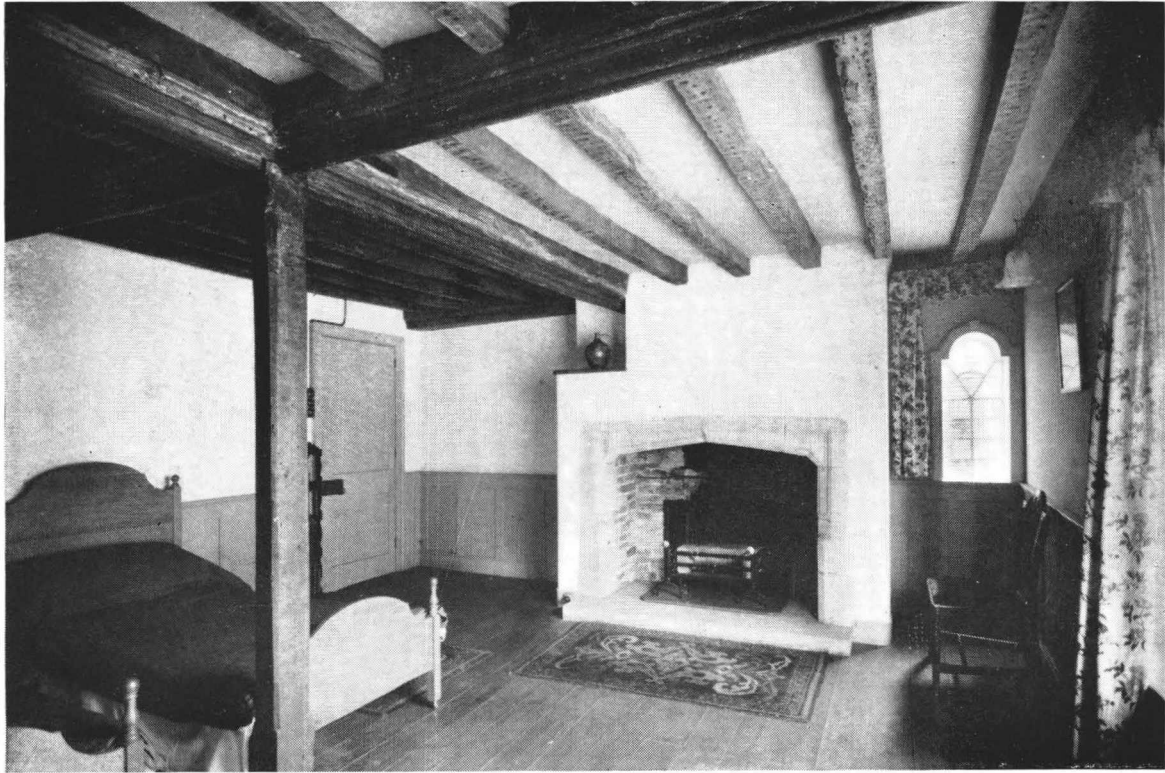


PLATE VI. TOM PAINE'S ROOM



PLATE VII. THE LANDING

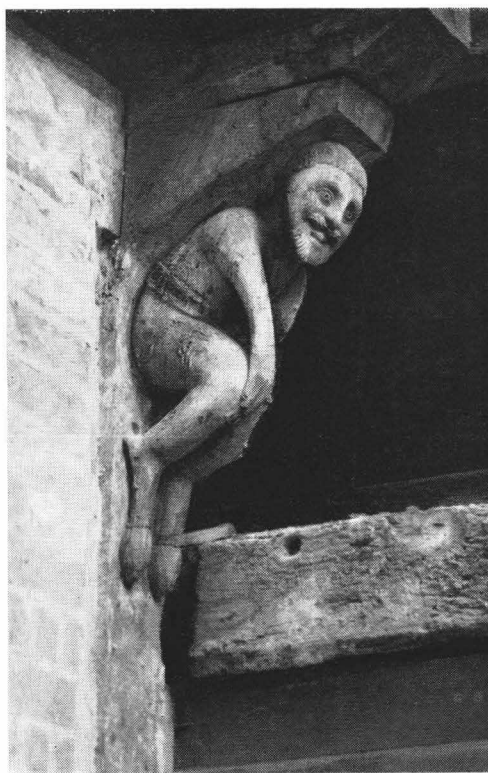
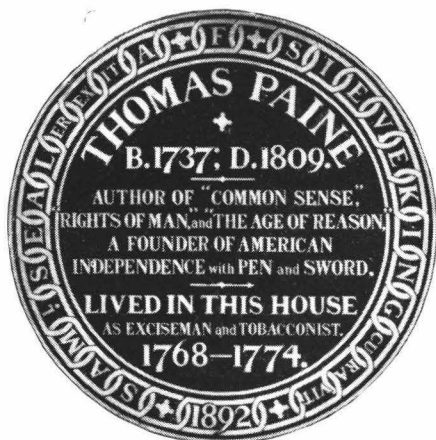


PLATE VIII. BUST OF THOMAS PAINE; PLAQUE recording his residence at the House described in this paper; THE SECOND SATYR opened up in 1922

altered in the last century but still retains the Goring arms, and some fine oak panelling dated 1579, fully four years before Sir Henry Goring purchased the Bull Inn.

Bull House had become a considerable building and its new owners in 1615, the Olivers, were people who owned a good deal of property in Lewes. John Rowe says they lived in 1620 in the house against the bridge on the north side of the High Street, and we know they owned also the White Lion and the rest of the frontage between St. Nicholas Lane and Walwer's Lane. From a codicil to the will of John Oliver (dated 1678), we gather that his wife Mary was to have the Bull inn (occupied by James Attree) for life. To this end, two trustees were appointed: the testator's brother-in-law Peter Courthope of Danny and his cousin Richard Isted of Lewes. In 1698, Mary Oliver and Peter Courthope (the surviving trustee) sold the Bull to Thomas Adams of Meeching (Newhaven) for £210 and he conveyed it in the same year and for a like amount to Thomas Barnard, the founder of Westgate Chapel. In this transaction Adams seems to have been acting as agent for Barnard, and the southern part of the property is thus described in the Chapel Trust Deed:—

All that edifice or building, in length from the east end thereof to the west end thereof, 60 feet, and in breadth from the north side thereof to the south side thereof forty and four feet, either more or less, situate and being in the parish of St. Michael, within the borough of Lewes, near the West Gate of the said Borough, and on the south side of the High Street of Lewes aforesaid, which edifice or building, or some part thereof, adjoined to the south side of a messuage or tenement there, formerly an Inne, and then called or known by the name of the Bull, all which said hereby granted edifice and premises, or such part thereof as was not built before the purchase thereof by Thomas Adams, together with the said messuage and gardens thereunto belonging, were formerly sold and conveyed by Mary Oliver, widow, and Peter Courthope, Esq., to Thomas Adams and his heirs, and were afterwards, by the said Thomas Adams, sold and conveyed to Thomas Barnard, the elder, Gent, and his heirs; and were since the building some part thereof by the said Thomas Barnard, sold and conveyed to the said Samuel Swayne and John Ollive and their heirs.

The trust deed was executed in 1719 but it was in 1698 that Thomas Barnard acquired the property and gutted the southern block originally added by Sir Henry Goring, leaving only the outer shell to form the Chapel. Large windows were formed out of the stone mullions and transoms of the old building, the roofs were reconstructed and octagonal posts were inserted to break the span and carry the internal framework. The alterations were so effective that all trace of the original arrangement of the house has been lost, save an old doorway and some few indications of former window openings in the east wall.

After the alterations had been effected the Rev. Thomas Barnard did not wish to retain more than the chapel itself, and so at the date of the Trust Deed just quoted, the timber building known as "The Bull" was sold for £100 to the Rev. John Ollive, who was

minister of the Chapel from 1711 to 1740. With this went a garden, north of the Chapel frontage, contained between the Chapel approach and the curving bastion of the West Gate. This little garden was alienated in recent years. Another garden was sold to Mr. Thomas Stonestreet for £32. The Chapel has remained an important centre of nonconformist worship, its present denomination being Unitarian. It was restored and refitted some years ago under the direction of Mr. Ronald P. Jones, Architect.

Bull House, its individuality restored to it by its sale to John Ollive, has continued to the present day in separate ownership. Samuel Ollive, tobacconist, inherited it from his father John, and brought up here three sons and a daughter, Elizabeth, all baptised at the adjoining Chapel. Early in 1768 Thomas Paine, well known by his services to the American struggle for independence and to the French Revolution, and also by his books *The Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason*, came to Lewes and lodged at Bull House. Paine was an Exciseman, and his official duties did not apparently debar him, soon after Ollive's death in 1769, from joining the widow in her business and marrying her daughter Elizabeth. We have not many details of his life here, but there are records of his prowess in argument at the Headstrong Club, a society that met for discussion at the White Hart Inn. The members had a custom of handing a volume called "The Headstrong Book" to the one who maintained his argument most vehemently, and Paine was so often the recipient that it received the following title, "The Headstrong Book, or Original Book of Obstinacy. Written by ——— of Lewes in Sussex, and Revised and Corrected by Thomas Paine."

In 1772 Paine interested himself in preparing the case of the Excisemen for better pay and conditions of service, to be placed before Parliament, but soon afterwards he lost his employment and his business of grocer and tobacconist failing, his effects were sold up in April, 1774. In June of the same year he and his wife separated by mutual agreement and she went to live with her brother at Cranbrook, where she died in 1808. In October, Paine himself had left Lewes for America.

The recent history of the house has been uneventful until it came into the hands of Alderman John Every, who in 1922 restored the building and disclosed the beauty of its ancient features. On the 24th October, 1923, the American Ambassador, Mr. George Harvey, visited the house, and in 1936 Mr. Every vested it in the Sussex Archaeological Trust to preserve it in perpetuity.

The building itself may now claim our attention. The external stone walls of the chapel are not continued in the division between it and the older building which we will call Bull House. The party wall was merely a partition of re-used timbers, brick-filled for only a few feet in height and plastered. The west wall of Bull House was, however, a thick wall of flint, stone-faced, and a considerable

portion of this remains on the ground and first floor. The rest of the building is oak-framed, a large proportion of the massive timbers being still preserved and showing clear evidence of mediaeval date. In the north-east angle formed by Bull House and the Chapel is a timber annexe of two stories and an attic which appears to date from the time of Goring's work (*temp* Elizabeth). The most probable explanation of its purpose is that it formed a porch and entrance to the stone-built house from the street, and this would account for the two carved figures which support the overhanging storey above.

The house itself apart from the porch is an irregular parallelogram, the north end towards the High Street being practically rectangular, but that towards the south ending obliquely against the chapel where it was cut away by Sir Henry Goring. It is divided transversely, by two heavily moulded beams, into what were originally no doubt three apartments. The northern section is eighteen feet from north to south, but its massive oak ceiling joists are divided by another beam (unmoulded) into two unequal parts, the northern being seven feet to the centre of the beam as against eleven feet for the southern. It is probable that they were once the same length and that the former carried a deep projecting storey over the street.

The greater part of this section is occupied by the front room, of which the oak in the ceiling is the only original feature. From the size of the timbers and the fact that they run through to a fifteenth-century beam we may safely put them down as of this date. The room at one time possessed a modern shop front and was used by the Lewes Liberal Club as a recreation room. The external walls on the north and east have been rebuilt, and windows inserted to match the external Georgian features of the house. The entrance at the angle of these fronts is by an eight-panelled Georgian door refixed here. The beautiful late eighteenth-century carved chimney-piece, with its spirited representation of Mars going to war, in a car drawn by lions, which was saved from 219, High Street, once the residence of the late Mr. Henry Blackman, replaced a modern fireplace and the interior has been specially cast at the Phoenix Ironworks in Lewes from two old panels of the period. The grate is an old example of the same time with a new back inscribed 1922. The fine oak doors which form a cupboard near the fireplace are probably of French or Flemish workmanship. Three steps lead from this room to the level of the hall (which has been raised) and the little oak balustrade and turned newels, which are of Georgian date, are an addition, and form a pleasant approach to the door, half of which towards the room is of the same period, while the other side is faced with moulded oak battens. Between the room just described and the first moulded beam, has been inserted an old oak staircase, rescued from No. 63 High Street, during its recent

demolition by the London City and Midland Bank. The balustrade is a copy of the old balusters which will be described on the second floor. The original stair had disappeared; it may have been where a trimming joist is to be seen in the front room.

The entrance hall from which the present stair runs occupies in the main the third compartment between the two moulded beams, mentioned above, a small portion being absorbed in the living room to the south. It quite possibly represents the "Screen passage" of the mediaeval house, and would therefore be the only part of the large hall to be floored over. The entrance from the street has been fitted with an old sixteenth-century door and was formed in 1922, being approached by broad brick steps under a projecting roof. The northern ceiling beam, which was apparently moulded on the south side only, was badly decayed and had been cut away for a modern stair. Enough remains to show that it is of fifteenth-century date and there is no evidence that it is not *in situ*. It has been repaired and new posts furnished for its support. The windows lighting the hall east and west are new, as are also the three moulded batten doors in oak. In the south-east angle can be seen the largest upright oak post in the house, which stands on brickwork some 3ft. above the floor and rises to the level of the second storey. To it is tenoned the large moulded beam in the sitting room.

This last-named room extends from the hall to the chapel wall. The fifteenth-century ceiling timbers stop at the moulded transverse beam to which they have been attached by unusually long oak pins. The ceiling south of this is of the time of Henry VIII and there is a long moulded beam of the same period which reaches to the chapel. Another short length parallel to this is to be seen south of the fireplace, and has the appearance of having been shortened. The ceiling joists are chamfered oak, but less than half the size of those in the front room and hall, and it is clear that the whole of this part of the house had been reconstructed in the early part of the sixteenth century, say, about 1525. Before this it may well have been the original hall, open to the roof, and the main moulded beam would mark the position of the screen. In keeping with this we see a moulded chimney beam of 16th-century date over the open fireplace which is a Tudor insertion. When the chimney stack was examined it was found to be in so ruinous a condition that it was necessary to rebuild it. So much modern work had been inserted that very little of the old remained, and its safety was imperilled by the way in which it had been cut away. Even the chimney beam had been removed except for the fragments which, fortunately, were sufficient for a correct reconstruction embodying all that was left. The mouldings are of unusual section for this position, the type being more often found on external fascia beams. Above it has been fixed a stone heraldic panel discovered in the walling of the old stack. It bears the arms of the Pelham

family (three pelicans in piety) carved in relief and dates from about 1500.¹

The open fireplace has been built entirely of old bricks from the old chimney, and in its hearth has been fixed a small millstone, also recovered in the alterations, with the following inscription around it:—

THIS . STONE . FOUND . HERE . PROBABLY . FORMED .
PART . OF . THE . TOBACCO . MILL . OF . THOMAS . PAINE.

The fireplace is furnished with a number of ancient accessories of the old English chimney corner selected from Mr. Every's Museum of Sussex Ironwork which he left to the Sussex Archaeological Society. The firedogs have been specially cast with the emblem of the bull, from models by Mr. Gordon Godfrey and the fireback is inscribed with the following rhyme which epitomises the building's history:—

HERE STANDS THE BULL WITHIN WEST GATE
²SIR HENRY GORING CHANGED ITS STATE,
HE BUILT A HOUSE WHEN BESS WAS QUEEN
WHICH WESTGATE CHAPEL SINCE HATH BEEN,
THE BULL FOR THOMAS PAINE FOUND ROOM
JOHN EVERY SAVED IT FROM ITS DOOM.

1922.

The remaining features are comparatively modern, but the western wall, where it is unaltered, is still of its original flint and stone, and the modern window openings have not been further changed.

The third room on the ground floor is now the kitchen and larder, and occupies the porch or entrance already referred to as Goring's work. It is a lofty room, and the oak ceiling joists, framed into a moulded diagonal beam attached to the "Satyr" corner post, are worth inspection. The fact that this room was a late addition receives further proof from the discovery of a small window on each side of the central chimney stack, that evidently looked into the open air on this side. These windows were high up, and probably lighted the hall. The southern one was indicated only by two lozenge-shaped holes in the sill with the remains of square mullions set anglewise, but so far decayed as to preclude the possibility of preservation. The northern was part of a window which probably had taken the place of an older one in the same position, since it has mouldings characteristic of the time of Elizabeth, and so could not have antedated the porch by more than a few years. It is preserved on the wall *in situ*. The old well is beneath the larder floor.

There is a basement under practically the whole of the building, where can be seen the foundation walls of stone and chalk, and also

¹ The Pelham Arms were the seventh quartering in the arms of Goring after the marriage of Sir William Goring with Elizabeth Covert.

² The Christian name George was cast in the fireback in error.

an open fireplace built of brick, with a wide segmental arch in place of a chimney beam.

The remaining old work on the first floor is, if anything, more complete than at the ground level. The north room, looking on the street, is traversed by a fine moulded oak beam of the Tudor period into which two similarly moulded beams are framed, meeting at a point now supported by an oak post of roughly octagonal shape. This post was no doubt inserted at some time when the main beam appeared unable to carry the weight of the floor above. The oak joists are similar to those in the sitting room on the ground floor, but are not chamfered. The fireplace in the room was modern and has been replaced by a replica (in old Reigate stone) of a sixteenth-century chimney-piece belonging to an old house which stood opposite in the High Street. The original was then in Mr. Every's museum. The eastern window dates from the latter part of the seventeenth century, while the northern bay window, like the panelled dado round the walls, belongs to the time of George III. Two small windows, east and west, have been inserted to give a view towards Malling Down and St. Anne's respectively. This room is traditionally known as that of Thomas Paine.

The space south of the stair is used as a lounge and in it the two mediaeval oak partitions are to be seen. The northern one has a king post truss with fine curved braces each side and a third to the east. This last had parted from the wall post and was the cause of the external framework falling outwards towards Bull Lane. The beam over it had also become much perished and a new tie beam of great strength had been inserted alongside probably about the time of Goring's alterations. An additional support has now been added under the latter beam. The southern partition is formed of wide oak uprights placed their own distance apart. At each end are posts, the eastern being the massive timber already described which is continued here from the ground floor. From it springs a large curved brace; its fellow brace at the other end had disappeared but is now replaced. The floor has the original oak boards.

The southern room has no original feature beyond the massive tie beam, which at an early period had fractured, and had been strengthened with heavy dogs of Sussex iron. It is now further supported by a post and brace. This beam has the appearance of being part of the central truss over the ancient hall, and the close framing of the northern partition would thus have been visible from below. The southern roof bay has practically disappeared owing to the later building. The old post in the south-east corner was found at the time of the restoration of the house to have practically no foundation, this part of the house having been miraculously sustained by nothing more than its reluctance to fall!

The first floor over the kitchen, the Goring "annexe," has been divided into three sections: a staircase to the second floor, a bathroom and a small bedroom. There is a considerable amount of oak

in the walls and ceiling, and in the east wall an Elizabethan window has been exposed.

The second floor is a forest of oak, all of which, as far as the roof and partitions are concerned, is original. The first room retains a king post (with part of its curved struts), which no doubt shows the first construction of the roof and is evidence of mediaeval date. In this room the rafters are exposed up to the ridge. The north window is a late seventeenth-century sash; the eastern dormer fills the place of one that had disappeared but of which there was sufficient evidence to show its position.

The dormer window in the other bedroom gives a fine view over Kingston Hill and the site of the windmills that are now but a memory. To the stair landing a dormer has been fixed and adapted as a balcony to take full advantage of the view. From this landing can be seen one of the two small eastern attics, which retain their original timbers, and a range of oak Elizabethan balusters which served as a model for those in the hall below.

NOTE.—The restoration of the house was carried out for Mr. Every by Mr. W. H. Godfrey, who lived here himself from early February, 1923, to May, 1929.