

NOTES ON GRAY'S INN.

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According to the most authentic records, the ancient manor of Portpøle, or Purpoole as it was originally called, became the property of the De Grays of Wilton about the year 1294; and both Stowe and Dugdale agree that in the reign of Edward III. a grant of the manor was made by this family to a society of students of the law, which thereupon took the name of the Society of Gray's Inn. It is not clear by what title the Society then held the property; but of the fact of its having been in their possession in the time of Edward III. there seems to be no doubt; for Stowe, quoting from a MS. of a Mr. St. Lo Kniveton—whom he describes as a learned gentleman, a rare antiquary, and an ancient fellow of this college—says, “An estate of this House was taken in the reign of Edward the Third by the gentlemen and professors of the common law, as Master Saintlow Kniveton affirmeth, out of his owne search and readings of antiquities concerning the house.” Pearce in his “Guide to the Inns of Court,” p. 315, quotes a MS. in the Lansdown collection to the same effect; and in a copy of a MS. in the Harleian collection, which copy is now in the possession of the Society, the name of William Skipwith is given as the first reader, who in the reign of Edward the Third was a Justice of the Common Pleas; and in the same MS. Sir Robert Asheton or Ashton, Lord Treasurer of England 49 Edw. III., appears among the list of members of Gray's Inn.

After this time there is, for very many years, a blank in the history of the Inn, owing to a fire which happened in the reign of James II., and by which the ancient records of the Society up to the 11th of Elizabeth were destroyed. But we learn from other sources that at the dissolution of the monasteries the Society held their property in

some way under the Monastery of Shene; and, the lands of that monastery having been seized by the Crown, the Society then began to pay a fee-farm rent to the Crown in respect of the property held by them; and there is distinct evidence that this fee-farm rent continued to be paid until the year 1733, when the Society redeemed it by purchase from the parties in whom it was then vested; by which purchase the Society became the absolute owners in fee of the property now known as Gray's Inn.

The destruction of the records of the Society, as above mentioned, also prevents us from being able to fix the date or extent of the ancient buildings of the Inn. But that they were by no means commodious appears from the fact that even the ancients of the House were "necessitated" to lodge double; as an illustration of this, Dugdale gives an account of a pension held on the 9 July, 21 Henry VIII. when John Hales, then one of the Barons of the Exchequer, produced a letter directed to him from Sir Thomas Neville, which was to acquaint the Society that he would accept of Mr. Attorney-General (Sir Christopher Hales) to be his bedfellow in his chamber here, and that entry might be made thereof in the book of their rules; and, among the curious orders of the Society relating to this practice, we find that in the 21st of Elizabeth it was ordered that "henceforth no fellow of this house shall make choice of his bedfellow, but only the readers; the admission of all others shall be referred to the discretion of the Treasurer."

There is no evidence when the Hall was first built; but Dugdale, quoting from records of the Society which are not now in existence, says the "Old Hall" was "seiled," in the year 1551, with fifty-four yards of wainscot, at 2*s.* per yard; and that four years afterwards the Society began the "re-edifying it," every fellow of the House having a chamber therein being assessed towards the charge thereof, upon penalty of losing his chamber in case he did not pay what he was then "taxt" at. The work was completed in the 2nd of Elizabeth, the charge amounting to 863*l.* 10*s.* 8*d.*

The windows of the hall contain the arms of distinguished members of the Society, but many of the escutcheons shown in Dugdale's "*Origines Juridicales*" have entirely disappeared, and the places of others have been so changed that it is now very difficult to trace them.

Among the older escutcheons still in a good state of preservation we may mention those of Sir William Gascoyne and Sir J. Markham,

Chief Justices of the King's Bench in the years 1401 and 1462 respectively; that of Lord Burghley; those of Nicholas and Francis Bacon; Thomas Moyle, Reader of the Society in 1534, and Speaker of the House of Commons in 1542; Anthony Fitzherbert, Chief Justice of the Common Pleas in the reign of Henry VIII.; and several others dated before the year 1600.

In this Hall were performed those masques and "revels" which in ancient times were celebrated with so much magnificence by the four Inns of Court. Hall in his Chronicle gives an account of one of these performances in the year 1526, "A Plaie at Gray's Inn." The "Plaie," which it seems was compiled by John Roo, a member of the Inn and serjeant-at-law, so displeased Cardinal Wolsey, who thought it alluded to him, that he sent for Roo, took from him his coif, and sent him to the "Fleet."

The Inns of Court that seem to have distinguished themselves most in these "Revels" were the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn, between which houses there seems anciently to have existed some kind of union, as is shown by the fact that on the great gate of the gardens of the Inner Temple appears at this day the "griffin" of Gray's Inn, whilst on the great gate in Gray's Inn Square is carved in bold relief the "winged horse" of the Inner Temple.

This union is also celebrated by Beaumont and Fletcher in a masque entitled "The Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn," and "Gray's Inn and the Inner Temple," which was performed at Whitehall in 1612; and "the strict alliance which ever was betwixt the two" houses is also mentioned in the "Epistle Dedicatory" to that somewhat rare and curious book the "Gesta Grayorum," which gives a detailed account of a masque performed at Greenwich Palace by the members of both houses in the year 1594. In the same book it is related that Queen Elizabeth, after the performance of the masque above mentioned, spoke of Gray's Inn "as an house she was much beholden unto, for that it did always study for some sports to present unto her." And the tradition of the house is that the screen under the gallery in the Hall, a most elaborate piece of carved work in oak, as well as some of the dining-tables now used in the Hall, were given to the Society by that Queen as tokens of her regard. It may also be mentioned that at dinner on the Grand Day in each term "the glorious, pious, and immortal memory of good Queen Bess" is still solemnly given in Hall.

That the rules of "deportment" were not altogether overlooked in dealing with the members of the Inn in former times, appears from the following orders. In the 16th of Elizabeth it was ordered that none of this Society should wear any gown or outward garment of any light colour upon penalty of expulsion. In the 27th year it was ordered that whosoever, being a Fellow of this House, did thenceforth wear any hat in the Hall at dinner or supper time, he should forfeit, for every time of such his offending, 3s. 4d.; and in the 42nd year of the same reign an order was made that no gentlemen of this Society do come into the Hall to any meal with their hats, boots, or spurs, but with their caps, decently and orderly, upon pain for every offence to forfeit 3s. 4d.; and that no gentleman of this Society do go into the city or suburbs, or to walk into the *fields*, otherwise than in his gown, upon penalty of 3s. 4d. Also "That no Fellow of the Society stand with his back to the fire."

"That no Fellow of the Society make any rude noise in the hall at exercises or at meal times."

Nothing is known of the origin or early history of the library. It is mentioned at the commencement of the existing records of the Society, viz. in the year 1568, and it is believed that at that time, and for many years afterwards, the library was merely a chamber in Coney Court, which, according to Stowe, formed the western side of what is now Gray's Inn Square.

In the year 1737 an Order of Pension was passed for building a library in Holborn Court, now South Square, which occupied part of the site now covered by the present library, which was built in 1841.

As with the libraries of other Societies, the early and principal source of this library was probably from donations, and the names of Finch, Banks, Hutton, Moseley, and the relatives of Lord Bacon, appear among the earliest donors.

It is believed on very good grounds that the gardens were originally laid out in the year 1597 under the direction of Lord Bacon, the then treasurer of the Society; and there is still preserved on the north-west side of the garden a "catalpa tree," which, tradition says, was planted by him. He evidently took great delight in these gardens, and there is an Order of Pension extant in the following terms:—

4 July, 1597. Ordered that the summe of £7 15s. 4d. due to Mr. Bacon, for planting of elm trees in the walkes, be paid next term.

And in the following year there was an order made for the supply

of more young elms, &c. the cost of which, as appeared by Mr. Bacon's account, was 60*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.*

In Pepys's time, as appears from his "Diary," "Gray's Inn Walkes" were much resorted to as a fashionable promenade.

In a letter from Venice, dated 1621, and addressed to a resident in Gray's Inn, the writer says, "I hold your walks to be the pleasantest place about London, and that you have the choicest society;"* and, coming down to a later day, most of the readers of this paper will probably remember the interview between Sir Roger de Coverley and his friend in "Gray's Inn Walks," which is so charmingly told in No. 269 of "The Spectator."

The existing records of the Society do not contain any reference to admissions before the year 1581. It is, however, certain that there were many of a much earlier date than this, for among the names of the many distinguished lawyers admitted in ancient times is that of Sir William Gascoyne. It is true we have no register of his admission, and it has been said that we rely most on having his arms in the window,† but in the Harleian MS. it is there stated he was a *Reader* of the Society, and therefore we think we may fairly claim the honour of his having been a member of this Inn.

To some of the earliest admissions the signature of Lord Burghley is attached, and closely following is that of Lord Bacon. Lord Burghley, according to his own MS. diary, still preserved in the British Museum, was admitted in 1541. Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper, was admitted in 1532, and his son Francis Bacon in 1576; and between the years 1592 and 1663, Bancroft, Juxon, Laud, Sheldon, and Whitgift, all of them afterwards Archbishops of Canterbury, were admitted members of the Society.

The names of many other eminent legal dignitaries and distinguished men who were members of this Inn might be added to this list. Of the former may be mentioned Sir Christopher Yelverton, Justice of the Queen's Bench in 1602, and Lord Chief Justices Holt and Raymond; and of the latter Thomas Cromwell, Earl of Essex; Thomas Wriothesley, first Earl of Southampton; John Dudley, first Duke of Northumberland; Henry Stanley, Earl of Derby; Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk; Edward Vere, Earl of Oxford; General Monk, Duke of Albemarle; Sir Thomas Gresham, founder of the Royal Exchange;

* Howell's Familiar Letters.

† Campbell's Lives of the Chief Justices, vol. i. p. 121.

and that "prince of antiquaries" William Camden. And it has been well observed that the roll of admissions of the four Inns of Court form a record of names as distinguished as can be found in any university of Europe.

On looking through the roll of admissions it is remarkable how much Gray's Inn used to be frequented by men of the same families. Of the family of Bacon there were Nicolas, Nathaniel, Edward, Anthony, and Francis. Of the family of Yelverton fourteen, of the family of Mosley seven, and so in many other instances.
