

# The Berkshire Archæological Journal

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## An Historic Muniment Chest at Reading.

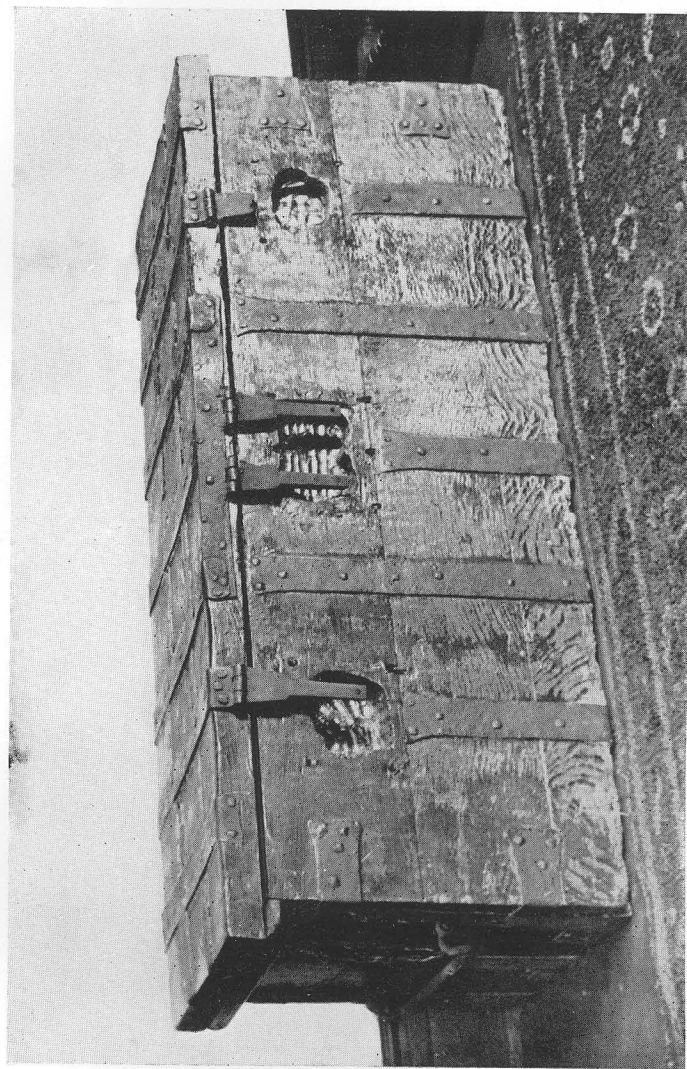
By the EDITOR.

THERE has recently been brought to light from the vaults of the Reading Town Hall an ancient muniment chest which would seem to have been associated with a somewhat stormy event in the annals of the town. In the year 1552, the Corporation decided to provide a chest in which their archives could be safely housed. The following is an extract from the records concerning the decision :—" Item that ther be a cofer provided with iij<sup>e</sup> lokkes and iij<sup>e</sup> keys wherin the comyn seale shall remayne, and one of the said keyes to remayne with the seid Mayour, the second with the Recorder or Styward, and the thirde with the most auncient Burges that hath bene Mayour, by them to be chosen, and that the seid seale not to passe in any cause but that the seid iij persons to be present, and also other iij<sup>e</sup> persons of the Burgeses, that is to say, vj in the whole."

On the 21st July, 1656, Sir John Barkstead, Steward of Oliver Cromwell's household, was elected as a burgess for Reading to sit in Parliament. The election seems to have caused some feeling among certain members of the Corporation as the following extract from the records will show :—

" 12 Feb. 1658. And whereas upon the 17th day of December last (being a quarter day for a publique meeting of the Company at the Town Hall) they mett after sermon in the Councill Chamber and being sate down Mr. Maior intending to dispatch many businesses then before them (proper for that day)

was in the first business he began to speake of interrupted by Mr. Cope one of the Aldermen who would have Mr. Maior presently put it to the vote whether the charges and damages which he might sustain by reason of the suite at law commenced by Mr. Daniel Blaggrave against the said Mr. Cope for his false return of Sir John Barkstead to be a Burgesse for this Borough to sitt in Parliament should be borne by the Company out of the Hall revenues which Mr. Maior and some of the Company conceiving to be illegal and vniust (in regard the said Mr. Cope did willfully doe it without their consent and affirmed that if any dammage should come thereby hee would beare it himselfe) Mr. Maior would not at that instant put it to the vote but would further consider of it. Whereupon diuers of the Aldermen and Assistants cryed allowed against the said Mr. Joel Stephens Maior disfranchise him, disfranchise him, and voted him to be disfranchised and tooke away the Mace and kept it by force and chose Mr. Frewin to be their Maior And upon the committing of this outrage the said Mr. Joel Stephens Maior and some of the Aldermen and Assistantes with the Clerke and Serjeantes departed out of the Councell Chamber and went to Mr. Maiors house Afterwards those that voted against the said Mr. Joel Stephenes Maior staid in the Councell Chamber broke open the presse cupboard where the bookes deedes bondes and many other writinges were of greate concernement and afterwarde broke open the greate iron bound Chest and took and carried away the Common Seale of this Borough and other thinges And since (although severall times summoned by Mr. Maiors appointment) They contrarie to their dutie and solempne oath refused to come to the Hall to consult of the affaires of the Corporacion For which and many other greate and notorious misdemeanors It is nowe resolved upon the question and ordered That the Actors Abettors and Contrivors of those greate insolent and notorious misdemeanors and offences viz Mr. Henry Frewin Mr. Richard Hollowaye Mr. John Harison Mr. Richard Allright Mr. William Mills Mr. Thomas Cope Mr. William Beislye and Mr. Thomas Blower Aldermen And Robert Creed Clement Marlowe Richard Stampe Roger Sherfeild David Webb and



*Ancient Muniment Chest in Reading Town Hall.*

Mr. Richard Bulstrode be and are hereby removed from their severall and respective places and offices of Aldermen and Assistentes of this Borough and are wholly discharged from the same."

There seems little doubt that the "greate iron bound Chest" is the one which has now been cleaned and wisely restored to a more dignified place in the Committee Room of the Council. A few words about the gentleman who caused the pother will not be amiss. On the 12th August, 1645, Sir John Barkstead was appointed by the House of Commons to be Governor of Reading and a few months later his appointment was confirmed by the House of Lords. Seven years later he was made Governor of the Tower of London and Cromwell praised his vigilance in that capacity in his speech to the Parliament of 1656. He was elected member for Reading in this year. In February, 1659, he was summoned before the Committee of grievances and obliged to release some prisoners. At the Restoration in 1660 like many of the regicides, he fled to Germany and probably would have died there in poverty (as Daniel Blagrove of Reading did) had he not been tempted to venture into Holland. Here he had the misfortune to run against the King's agent, George Downing, who had become loyal to the King, and was despatched as envoy extraordinary into the United Provinces, where under the promise of safety, he trepanned several of Cromwell's former supporters, including Barkstead, and sent them over to England to suffer death for having been members of the Commission for trying Charles I.<sup>1</sup> Barkstead was executed on the 19th April, 1662.

The Editor is indebted to the Town Clerk of Reading for permission to have photographed the "greate iron bound Chest," and to his assistant, Mr. S. Davies, for some of the foregoing particulars.

<sup>1</sup> *Army Lists of the Roundheads and Cavaliers*, Ed. E. Peacock, F.S.A., 1874, p. 38.