

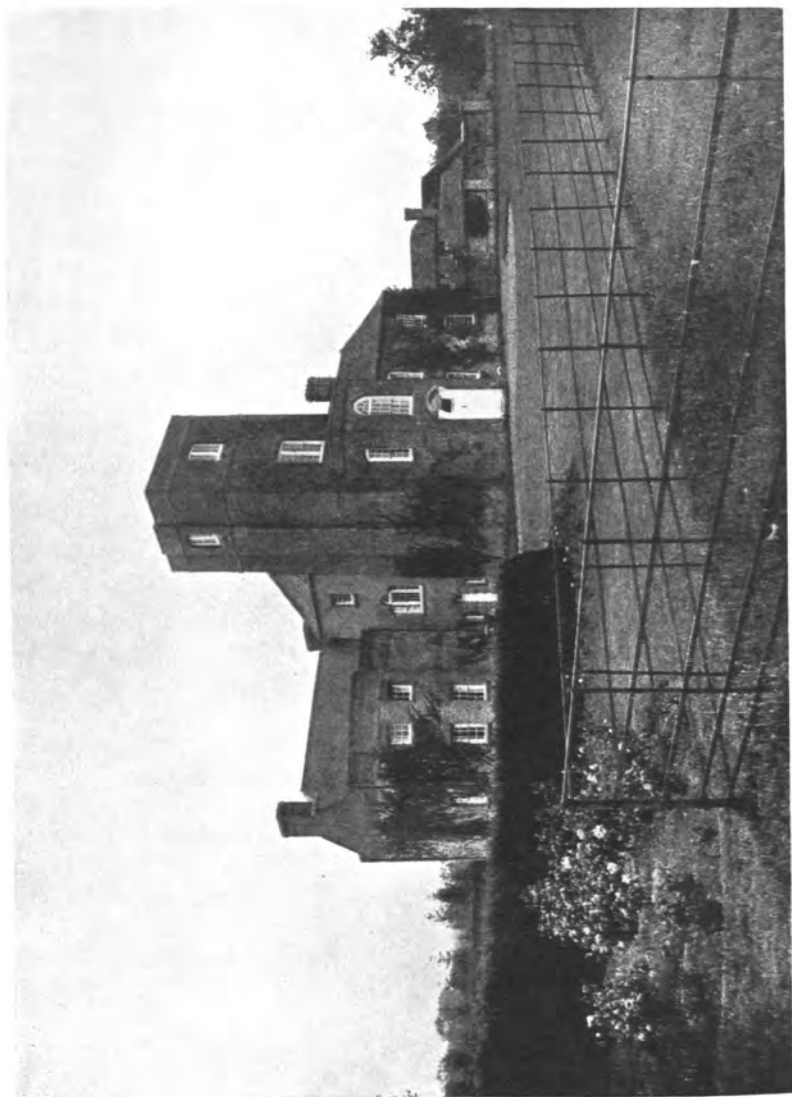
ROMDEN PLACE AND ITS RESTORATION.

BY W. BASIL WORSFOLD.

THIS small, but structurally and historically interesting, house lies on the eastern edge of the parish of Smarden, some seven miles by crow-flight from Ashford. As it came into my hands in 1909 and passed out of them in 1919, some explanation of the circumstances which brought me there, and of my ability to write about it after so long an interval of time, is due to the reader.

In the years 1909-13 I was largely occupied in writing the concluding volumes of my account of Lord Milner's High Commission in South Africa, and for the purpose I wished to be within easy reach of him. Milner had purchased Sturry Court in 1906; but owing to builders' delays it was not until Christmas, 1908, that it became "a going concern," and the six cases of letters and documents, packed with meticulous care at Johannesburg in 1905 by Mr. Geoffrey Dawson—then Milner's secretary and now (and for many years past) editor of *The Times*—could be recovered from Harrod's and lodged in the Oasthouse. A few weeks after I had paid my first visit to Sturry, Romden Place, conveniently near to Canterbury and attractive in its picturesque decay, was offered for sale, and I bought it. My ability to write now about the restoration of twenty years ago is due to the circumstance, that an article written in 1912, but never published, remains in my possession. And it is from this contemporary account, shorn of its exuberant architectural and antiquarian details, that these pages have been taken.

When, in May 1909, I took possession of my new home, Romden Place had been discarded as a residence by its owners for more than a century. Its avenue and protecting woodlands had been ruthlessly cut down, its gardens turned into



ROMDEN PLACE (FROM S.E.) AS RESTORED.

pasture, two-thirds of the Stuart front had been demolished completely in 1866, and the remaining fabric, except the part inhabited by successive tenants of the farm, was in a more or less ruinous condition. To add to the difficulty of restoration, what survived of the 18th century mansion was a highly composite structure, embodying portions of three distinguishable buildings of whose respective dates and characters no one could tell me anything. Plainly, before any intelligent restoration could be attempted, I must learn something of the history of the house and of the people who had lived in it.

A study of the County and local histories left me with some vague but stimulating information. A coin of Faustina had been found on the site ; a certain Nicholas de Rumdene appeared in the Kent Assize Roll of 25 Henry III (1240) ; and the Guldefords were possibly among the mediæval owners of the "place." The suggestion of a Roman occupation, though thrilling, did not promise to help me in my immediate problem, but I got a certified copy of the entry in the Assize Roll from the Record Office. From this record two facts emerged. In 1240 the burh-ealdor of the Vill of Smarden (i.e., the head of the freemen who were collectively *burh*, or surety, for the good behaviour of its inhabitants) lived at Romden ; and his house was built substantially enough to enable him to offer resistance to a crowd of at least 27 persons. These facts, with the added consideration that Smarden even at this early date must have been a place of some size, since, in less than a century later (1332) it became a market town by charter of Edward III, led me to infer that in the stone walls of the basement (flooded when I got possession) I had the remains of Nicholas' house, or a close successor to it ; while the embanked quadrilaterals, enclosed between the moat and the river Beult in the adjacent field still named "The Hamlets," would be the site of the dwellings of his dependant labourers. As indicated by the existing walls, this 13th century Romden would have been a stone-built house of the manor-house type, consisting of a porch, hall,

kitchen and buttery, with a bower above the buttery for the sole use of Nicholas and his lady.

The reputed ownership of the Guldefords (*Villare Cantianum*, by Thomas Philipot, 1659: p. 312) seemed likely to throw light upon the tower, the stable-range, and other parts of the fabric built of dark-red brick, and otherwise distinguishable from the structures of the Stuart and later periods. For at the time in question (1450-1509) the Guldefords (or Guildfords) had two seats both within 8 miles by crow-flight from Romden: Halden Place in Rolvenden—the older of the two—and Hemsted Place in Benenden.¹ While Hemsted, the later and far more imposing mansion, has been completely demolished, at Halden, long since converted into a farmhouse, I found a stable range, and other survivals of the 15th century mansion, built of the same dark-red bricks and otherwise resembling the corresponding structures at Romden.

But more persuasive than any such evidence is the tower itself. When I came in 1909 the porch and the windows had been bricked up, the ground floor (converted into a bake-house and coal cellar) and the floor above had small extemporary windows, but the two upper floors, to which access was gained by a ladder, were in total darkness. And, what was more disastrous, the lead roof had been for many years past so much neglected, that the rain water had rotted the wood-work of the interior, and the whole of the floor-timbers, and seven out of the eight massive oak beams which carried them, had to be replaced. Yet, in spite of this neglect its 2 foot 6 inch walls had been built so solidly, that the external lines of the fifty foot elevation were only six inches out of the perpendicular. The house of which this tower was an integral part would scarcely have been built for the occupation of an insignificant esquire. With much greater

¹ Sir Richard Guldeford, High Sheriff of Kent in 1494, appears to have been the last Guldeford to live at Halden. His second son, George, was established at Hemsted; and successive Guldefords lived at Hemsted up to the time of Sir Robert Guldeford, created a baronet by James II, who died without issue. The baronetcy then became extinct, and the Manor of Hemsted was sold c. 1718 to Admiral Sir John Norris.

probability, a structure so massive, and, as having no windows on the ground floor, adapted for defence as well as domestic convenience, would have been raised by the scion of a powerful and adventurous race such as were the Guldefords at the time of their reputed ownership of Romden Place. Sir Richard Guldeford of Halden, and his son Sir Henry (1487-1532) were active supporters of Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond. In Shakespeare's *Richard III*, among the evil tidings which reach the king at his palace in London, the SECOND MESSENGER reports :

My Liege, in Kent the Guildfords are in arms.

And they naturally enjoyed the favour of Richmond, as Henry VII, and of his son Henry VIII. In his portrait by Holbein (1527) Sir Henry Guldeford is presented as Comptroller of the Royal Household and a knight of the Garter : while in his youth he had won distinction under Ferdinand and Isabella.¹

And from Philipot I learnt that in 1532 John Rogers sold Romden to Stephen Drayner,² who (or a son of the same name) passed it by sale in 1574 to Sir Roger Manwood.³ But that the next year (he wrote) Sir Roger "conveyed it to Martin James, Esq., Remembrancer of the Court of Exchequer. It is now [1659] come down to acknowledge the propriety of Mr. . . . James."

¹ The Burkes (J. and J. B.) in their *Extinct and Dormant Baronetcies of England* (1838), s.v. "Guldeford of Hemsted," say : "For his services against the Moors in the reduction of Grenada, [he] received the honour of Knighthood from King Ferdinand of Spain, and an augmentation to his paternal coat of arms of 'a pomegranet slipped upon a canton,' being the ensigns (*sic*) [The arms of Granada were : "Argent, a Pomegranat, the Shell open, grained Gules, stalked and leaved, proper."] of that regained province." On the other hand the *Dictionary of National Biography* calls it "a ridiculous story." But be this as it may, the Guldeford arms from this time onwards included "a canton of Grenada for augmentation," and I found in one of the outbuildings at Romden a carved oak doorway with a Tudor rose in one spandril and a (Granada) pomegranate in the other. Another fact which creates a slight presumption in favour of the Guldeford ownership of Romden is the statement (*Arch. Cant.*, XIII., p. 391) that the Manwoods and Guldefords were connected by marriage.

² For Drayner (or Dragoner) see Fox's *Acts and Monuments*, Vol. III., pp. 52 and 815. There still exists in Smarden a timber-frame house, with dragons carved on the tie-beam of the gable—presumably that of the Drayners.

³ For Manwood (1525-1592), see Foss' *Judges of England*.

The new proprietor was able at once to be of service to Smarden. In that year (1575) Queen Elizabeth made a "progress" through Kent. On 10th August she was entertained at Hemsted by Sir Thomas Guldeford, Knt. Later she came to Smarden, and renewed the market charter of Edward III. The document (an "inspeximus"), which bears the signature of Martin James, is a fine piece of engrossing with a portrait of the Queen in the initial letter. It hangs on the north wall of St. Michael's, Smarden, beneath the memorial tablet to the Otway descendants of Martin James.

The affair of Nicholas and Philipot gave me sufficient knowledge of the early history of Romden to embark upon the restoration of what remained of it. The stone walls in the basement were to be assigned to a 13th or 14th century dwelling of the manor-house type; the dark brick structures belonged to a "place" (i.e., a fortified place) of the 15th and 16th centuries; and the Stuart remains were the work of the descendants of Martin James, who, after it had been settled by him upon his son Henry in 1586, had held it up to 1786. And here it must be added that the Jameses terminated in the male line with the death of Walter James in 1664; but that Auria, his only child and heiress, carried Romden to her husband John Otway, of Mitcham, Surrey, and that successive Otways then continued to hold it up to 1786.

Following the advice of Mr. Frank Brangwyn, a frequent and very welcome visitor, I decided to restore only what actually remained, and in so doing to put the house back as much as possible into the condition to which it had been brought in the 18th century. In the two years of investigation (1909-10) I had collected all the meagre fragments of the furnishing of the mediæval and Stuart houses, which were scattered about the house itself, the out-buildings, and the site. Nearly all the panelling, mantle-pieces and entablatures of doorways, had been removed or burnt for fire-wood. The only room in which something of the furnishings remained *in situ*, was the library in the tower. Here were two bookcases set in pilasters, parts of a bold cornice from

which rose a coved ceiling, and some handsome panelling. All of this fine early Georgian woodwork was badly rotted, and although prepared for painting, unpainted. The reason for the unfinished condition of this room (the second floor of the tower) was this. In May, 1758, Romden was being repaired for the reception of Colonel Charles James Otway, but on the following 6th October Lady Bridget Otway (born Feilding, d. of the 4th Earl of Denbigh) was buried at Smarden Church. The sudden abandonment of the furnishings was due, no doubt, to Colonel Otway's grief at the premature death of his wife. One of these two bookcases was sufficiently sound to be restored, and it was placed, together with other original woodwork of the same period, in the first floor of the tower—formerly "Sir Henry James' Lodging Chamber"—and thus painted, after a delay of a century and a half, in 1911.¹ On the other hand, I was able to recover quite a number of the Stuart and Georgian doors, many of which had been used to patch up the farm buildings; and in the event out of 22 doors used, excluding those in the basement and kitchens, only 8 were reproductions.

The restoration of the house on these lines was carried out under my supervision by Messrs. R. Corben and Sons, of Maidstone, in 1911; and while it was in progress I continued my researches. Two circumstances made it easy to trace the history of Romden in the 17th and 18th centuries. From 1610 to 1654 the Jameses were popish recusants; and the Otways, who took it from Auria James, were a fighting family. And apart from the facts supplied by the Domestic State Papers, Army records, Wills, and Parish registers, I was assisted greatly by Mr. R. Garraway Rice, F.S.A., a brother Templar who has made a special study of the Mitcham records. But plainly only one or two of the more engaging features of this voluminous information can be brought within the space allotted to this paper.

¹ In *The Antiquities of Smarden*, published in 1866, Mr. Francis Hazelwood relates how he found a book out of this library at Bridgenorth in Shropshire. It was a copy of Erasmus' *Colloquies* in Latin, published in 1655, with a book-plate of the arms of "Charles Otway, Esqre., of Romden, Kent," inside the cover.

The life of Sir Henry James, Martin James' son, with its dramatic reversal of fortune, might well provide a subject for a novelist. Married in 1586 to a daughter of Sir John Rivers, citizen and Alderman of London, and then endowed by his father with Romden and other property, his early life, when three sons and two daughters were born, would seem to have been singularly prosperous; and some fifteen years after his marriage his prosperity was crowned by a knighthood. Then adversity came upon him. Sometime between 1599, when he gave 26s. 8d. to the new bells for Smarden Church, and 7th October, 1603, when he and Dame Dorcas were "presented" for absenting themselves from church for "six weeks or thereabouts," he either resumed or adopted the old religion. By 1610 he had been adjudged a Popish recusant, and, as such, two-thirds of all his lands, leases and farms were liable to be seized by the Crown.¹ To impose this harsh penalty the Kent Commissioners held an inquiry into his affairs at Rochester Castle on 6th March, 1612, when all his property was disclosed. In the meantime Sir Henry and his family had left Romden, and on the following 2nd June an inventory and valuation of the contents of the deserted house was made.

From this "trewe and perfecte Inventory"—for which I was indebted to the late Mr. Paley Baildon, F.S.A.—I learnt not only the rooms of which the house consisted in 1612, but the "goodes remayninge" in them, and the amounts at which some of them were "prised." On the ground floor (apart presumably from the porch, entrance hall under the tower, and the staircase hall) there were the dining hall (probably that of the stone house), the "greate parlor," the "lyttle parlor," the "kychen," and the "lyttle house next to" it. On the first floor were the "greate chamber over the hall," Sir Henry's "lodginge chamber," with an "inner closset" (probably the porch chamber) adjoining, the chambers over the great and little parlors, and various "clossets." On the second floor were an "old chamber"

¹ 3 James I, c. 4.

and a "greate garrett." The furniture, besides the more ordinary "courte cupboards," "chayres," "chestes," and "bedsteddles," included one "warminge pan," "satten ymbrodered and needle worke" cushions, and "three turkey worke carpettes." The contents of the dining hall were: "Two joyned tables, two planke tables standinge on tressells, one other planke, one horseman's staffe, two formes, six threcornered stooles, one payre of cobirons, one courte cupboard and one payre of tables without men[i.e. chess or draught boards] 30s." (Exchequer—Special Commissions, No. 3946.)

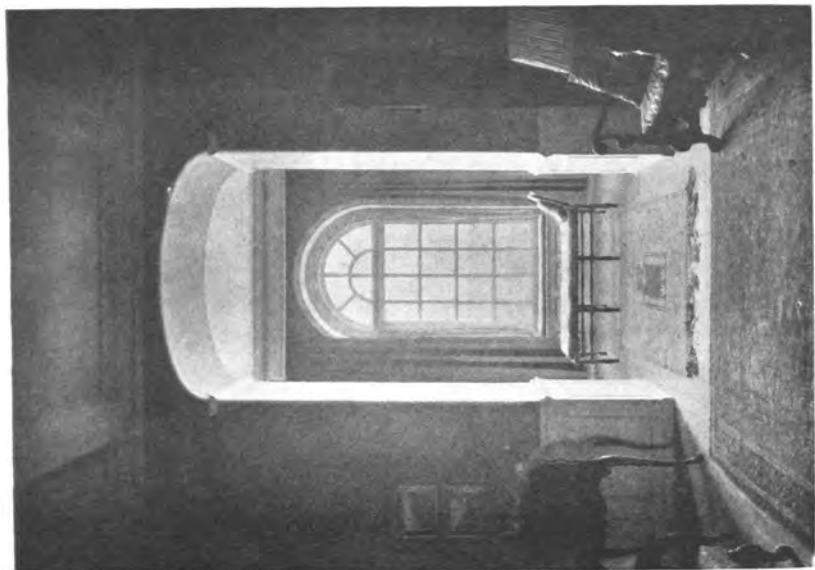
From this time onwards up to 1654, when, under the Act of the preceding year, all their estates in Kent were discharged from sequestration, the descendants of Sir Henry James were persecuted and impoverished. In 1650, however, Walter James, a grandson of Sir Henry, inherited Romden; and when he, or a son of the same name, died some time between 6th May, 1663 and 6th April, 1664, the family failed in the male line. In his will (6 May, 1663) he left "Rumden" and other lands, with the residue of his personal estate, to his only child "Auriah James" (P.C.C., Bruce, fo. 123), who married John Otway, of Mitcham, Surrey. Hasted epitomises her life in a note, which reveals her as a woman of remarkable vitality. She was "married at 14,¹ and died *æt.* 40, having had 20 children, of whom only seven sons[?] survived."

After their marriage Auria and her husband lived in Surrey; since, with the exception of James, the eldest son, and a daughter, Margaret, who was living (and married) in 1721, all of her 20 children appear in the Mitcham registers. Another son, Charles (b. 1686, d. 1764), whose daughter Sophia married Lt.-Gen. William Wynyard, became a soldier and rose to the rank of a general officer. John Otway, who was buried at Mitcham on 6th June, 1702, left Romden in undivided shares to his seven surviving sons, but James, having bought out his brothers, became sole

¹ For the matter of that, so was Margaret, d. of Henry VII., who carried the crown of England to James I.



Door to Staircase Hall.



Sir Henry James's "lodging chamber."

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possessor of the estate in 1717. His career was adventurous and successful. He entered the Army as a cornet in 1692, and he married Elizabeth Lightfoot sometime *before* 1696 ; since between that date and 11th March, 1702 (when he was re-commissioned Captain in Farrington's newly raised 29th Foot) two children of the marriage were baptised, and three buried, at Mitcham. Subsequently he fought in the war of the Spanish Succession, and was taken prisoner at Brihuega. On 28th May, 1713, he was made Lieut.-Colonel in Harvey's Horse (2nd Dragoon Guards), and on 7th January 1718, he became Colonel of the 9th Foot. In the year before he had obtained sole possession of Romden, and evidently it was about this time that he settled there with his family. For in his will (26th September, 1720) he is described as "James Otway of Romden in the County of Kent, Esquire," and in the next year the Smarden churchwardens spent 5s. when "the Colonel came home." Then he left Romden again to become Governor of St. Philip's Castle, Minorca (retained under the Treaty of Utrecht), where he died on 23 December, 1725, being buried in Smarden Church on 21 April, 1726. Apparently he enjoyed life in that pleasant island, since he built himself a house there, and died "indebted to the regiment" in the sum of £1,900. *En revanche* Madam Elizabeth survived the Colonel by more than thirty years ; and, although she died at Maidstone, most of them were spent at Romden, and she was buried in Smarden Church on 18 August, 1756.

Charles James, who succeeded Colonel James Otway, was also a soldier, and rose to the command of a regiment. As mentioned before, he married Lady Bridget Feilding and the two elder of their five children were born at Romden respectively in 1727 and 1730. He died in 1767, and was buried at Smarden. His will (1 October, 1759) found by his daughter, Bridget, "in a chest which usually stood in a closet to his bed chamber," was "written with [his] own Hand upon half a sheet of large Paper at Romden," and provided (*inter alia*) that the "expence" of his funeral was not to exceed £10.

He was succeeded by his third son, Charles, baptised at Smarden on 20 July, 1730. Charles Otway, a civilian and unmarried, was living at Romden in 1785, but his two brothers were dead, while his cousin, Francis Otway of Riverhill, Sevenoaks (d. c. 1773), had left four daughters but no son. In the absence of male descendants he sold Romden in the following year. He died in 1797 and his sister Bridget, the last of the Romden Otways, in 1804. Both were buried at Smarden Church, where they and their parents, with other members of the family, are commemorated in a memorial tablet.

Thomas Witherden, to whom the estate was sold in 1786, was a neighbouring landowner, and neither he, nor his son George, who inherited it in 1800, lived at Romden. On the death of George Witherden in 1849, the estate passed to a distant relative, F. W. Curteis, of Wissenden House, Tunbridge Wells, who also failed to make his home there. In 1907, the Curteis Trustees offered the whole of the Romden property for sale, and two years later the ruined house, with some 76 acres of land, came into my hands, in the circumstances, and with the results, already narrated.

One other point I was able to clear up. In June, and again in August, 1912, Mr. Paley Baildon, stayed with me, and investigated the site with a view to obtaining some evidence of the Roman occupation suggested by the previous discovery there of a Roman coin. During his first visit he found pieces of pottery and fragments of slag in the fields named 'the Orchard,' 'the Hamlets,' and 'Black Pits'; and on his return to London he showed three of the pieces of pottery to Sir Hercules Reid, Mr. C. R. Peers, and Sir W. H. St. John Hope. These authorities pronounced the two dark-coloured pieces to be undoubtedly Roman, and another of lighter colour to be either very coarse Roman or mediæval. The bits of iron slag were handed to Prof. Gowland, F.R.S., and proved on analysis to be of mediæval and not Roman origin. As, however, the Saxon iron smelting generally followed in the track of the Roman,

there remained a probability that the shallow iron-stone beds on the site were worked once by the Romans. Subsequent and more complete investigations, including the digging of trial trenches, in August produced many more fragments of pottery and the constant occurrence of iron slag both in 'the Orchard' and 'Black Pits' fields. The presence of this pottery, some of which was undoubtedly Roman, while the rest was Celtic or British of the Roman era, showed that Romden was an inhabited site at the time of the Roman occupation of Britain, but it leaves the derivation of the name uncertain. It is certainly curious that of the 20 or 30 'dens' marked on the Ordnance map within a radius of (say) 3 miles of the site, the only one distinguished as Rom-den should prove to be that at which these evidences of occupation during the Roman period have been found. On the other hand, there appears to be no other place-name in England in which the syllable 'rom' is known to stand for Roman, while the O.E., or Anglo-Saxon, 'rum' (meaning 'roomy') is its accepted etymology in the many place-names, such as Romford (roomyford), in which it occurs.

But although the Romden Otways closed with the death of Bridget at Ashford in 1804, at the other end of the county the descendants of Martin James in the female line were 'carrying on,' and they still survive. Of the four daughters of Francis Otway of Riverhill, grandson of Auria and John Otway, two, Sophia and Auria, were married respectively in 1783 and 1789 to Thomas and Multon Lambarde. These brothers were descendants of William Lambarde (b. 1536, d. 1601), the author of the *Perambulation of Kent*; and Multon kept a diary, from which we know that while Sophia died in less than four years after her marriage, Auria lived until Christmas Eve, 1821, and bore to the diarist five daughters and two sons. One entry may be cited, for a last glimpse of the Romden family. The third daughter (we read) was born on 16 October, 1792, and baptised on 16 November "by the names of Bridget and Aurea (*sic*), my wife's cousin Mrs. Bridget Otway and . . . being Sponsors."

And before I sold Romden¹ I had the good fortune to meet one of these Lambarde descendants of Martin James. On 14 May, 1919, Brig.-Gen. F. Lambarde, who like his 16th century ancestor was making a tour on foot through Kent, turned aside to visit the ruins of what had been once the home of the Romden Otways. On that occasion it was certainly a great pleasure to me, and I think some satisfaction to him, to know that Romden Place was no longer a ruin but once more (in Lord Milner's words²) 'a going concern.'

¹ At Michaelmas, 1919, to the Rt. Hon. Sir Ralph Paget, P.C., K.C.M.G., the first British Ambassador to Brazil.

² He stayed there in 1910 before the restoration, when he scrambled up to the roof of the tower, where to my great anxiety he proceeded to look over the edge, with one foot on the low, crumbling parapet.