

## LYDD RECORDS.

BY HENRY STRINGER (TOWN CLERK).

LYDD is well known as a limb of the Cinque Port of Romney, and seems to have been associated therewith in its very earliest records. The town of Lydd, as the charters shew, existed before the Conquest; the privileges which its "barons" enjoyed, in the time of King Edward the Confessor, being mentioned and confirmed by subsequent kings of England. In the reign of Henry VI, it was incorporated, and has ever since been governed by a bailiff, jurats, and commonalty. It appears, originally, to have comprised three boroughs, named Lydd, Dengemarsh, and Ingemarsh or Orwaldstone.

The borough of Dengemarsh was situated on the south, and south-west, sides of the present town.

The borough of Ingemarsh (on the west side of the river Rother) was divided into three parts, Westbroke, Orwaldstone, and Midley (Middel ea or Middle Island), held under different lords. Belgar was in Orwaldstone, and belonged to the prior of Bilsington.

The Archbishop of Canterbury was the chief lord of the town of Lydd, and the bailiff, jurats, and commonalty were called "the archbishop's men."

William the Conqueror, it is stated in the records, having founded an abbey at Battel, gave to its abbot the manor of Dengemarsh; including a manor house and certain demesnes. Some of the lands within the borough, however, did not belong to the said manor, but to divers men of Lydd and Dengemarsh.

The Court Hall is a very modern building, which serves both for the assemblies of the corporation, and for the sessions of the justices. Until the last century, there appear

to have been two separate edifices; one, built about the time of Henry VII, called the *Court House*, adjoined the church-stile, and beneath it was the market place, with the pump. The other, called the Commons' House, or place for the assemblies of the corporation, stood by the south side of the churchyard, and was erected in the year 1429. The remains of this wooden house can still be seen; it is the residence of Mr. Burkitt.

The muniments of the town extend back over several centuries, and are tolerably well preserved. They consist of several charters, assembly or court books, and books of the town accounts.

The earliest charter, of which we have any trace, is that of King Edward I, which probably does not now exist. It granted that the barons of Lydd and Ingemarsh should have the same liberties, and free customs, as the barons of Romenhale, and the other barons of the Cinque Ports; finding one ship, and taking part in the king's expeditions.

This charter was confirmed by King Edward II.

The earliest charter in our possession is that of 12 July, 1364 (38 Edward III), confirming the previous charters. It is in Latin, and has a seal and a painting of the arms of the corporation.

Our other charters were granted by Richard II (1390), Henry IV (1400), Henry V (1413 and 1415), and Edward IV (1464), confirming the previous charters, and reciting the rights and privileges of the Cinque Ports in the time of Edward the Confessor and William the Conqueror.

There is among the town archives a curious old box, stated to contain "an inquest on the death of a man;" but it now contains a parchment agreement, dated 1386, made between the prior of Bilsington and the town of Lydd, as to carrying off some cattle.

The court books commence with the fifteenth century, and are regularly brought down to the present period. Their contents are very amusing, but they throw little light on the early history of the town.

The books of the town accounts, however, which begin about the year 1425, contain entries of the most interesting

and quaint description. They have been inspected, and fully reported upon by the late Mr. Riley, on behalf of the Historical Manuscripts Commission. Among the payments recorded are gifts to officials, great and small, "to gain their favor;" fees, and refreshments, given to minstrels attached to the households of the great, who were periodically "starring" in the provinces; also to the "boy bishop," who came over from Romney, on St. Nicholas day, annually, and was fêted accordingly.

Periodical payments were made for candles, kept burning on the nights of the nativity of John the Baptist (Midsummer day) and of St. Peter's day; for watchfires kept burning, and to men employed to watch, on the church steeple for weeks together, to give notice of the approach of enemies.

Money was paid for shouting proclamations, at the church-stile, and on the sea coast.

Soldiers, periodically quartered in the town, brought about many quarrels, and bribes were freely bestowed upon their officers to get rid of them.

Payments occur for wrestling matches, held on Sunday, sometimes at Brookland as well as at Lydd.

The Bailiff and Jurats took refreshment occasionally together, while in council at the Common House, at the town's expense, but they seem to have been contented with very inexpensive fare, of dry bread and a draught of beer or ale. Deputations of the Bailiff, Common Clerk, and Jurats were perpetually leaving the town, to transact its business in London and at various other places.

The Lieutenant of Dover Castle appears to have held Sessions upon the sea-shore.

The Lydd people contributed to the cost of repairing "Illesbridge," between that town and Romney, across the river Rother.

Proclamations were made against dice and tennis playing, and against bilam (ball) playing, to induce the youth of Lydd to employ their time in practising archery, and other *more manly* recreations.

Expenses were incurred for repairing the town "gunnes," and dragging them to the sea side. Some late specimens of

these guns may now be seen at the corners of the streets, as in Romney, with their muzzles buried in the ground. Payments were made for cannon balls of stone, and for stocking the great gun called the *Serpentine*, the weight of which is given as 2 cwt. 3 qrs. 18 lbs., and its cost 36s.

Entries occur as to "light-silver," and "torch-silver," collected for lights burning before the images of saints in the church.

Some curious items are entered with reference to a town sergeant, who seems to have got into trouble, and was imprisoned in the Castle at Canterbury, where he lost his purse, his sword, his dagger, a pair of "botys" and a "payre of sokkys," value 4s. Payments were made to the "Maister Porteur" of the Castle, to get his horse, his cloak, and his "sporys" back again.

The Town Clerk's robe (he had a new one every year), cost 6s. 8d.

Sums were borrowed for fitting out soldiers, who fought under the Earl of Warwick at the battle of Southampton; also for troops, supplied by the town, who fought under the Earls of March and Warwick, at the second battle of St. Albans, in 1461; and also in support of the town's contingent, under the Earl of March, in the campaign which terminated at Towton in Yorkshire. Charges are entered for twenty-one men, going a voyage with the Lords of Clarence and Warwick.

Other payments were to the organ maker, for "the organes for the church," 18s. 1d.; expenses incurred in fitting out a vessel to escort Lady Margaret, "who is to be Queen of England;" and the cost of a new belfry in 1445.

Among the records is a curious bond, entered into with sureties by a man named Thomas Edrick, that he should not break the tenth commandment, nor covet the wife, daughter, or servant of William Ferdyngeley, of Lydd, nor yet of any other man of that parish.

The following localities are referred to in the accounts. Schelleys Land, Old Langport, Pigwell, Kettewell, Hettiswall, Lambard Wall, Brodewater, Trygggestreete, Three Elettes (Aldertrees), etc., etc.

The *Customal of Lydd* is interesting. Our copy is dated in 1476, and was written by a town clerk named Thomas Caxton (who may have been a relation of the celebrated printer, William Caxton), for which writing he was paid 13s. 4d. It consists of twenty-eight leaves of vellum, and is bound with part of a service book of the fourteenth century.

The contents of this book have been pretty freely set out in the report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission, and from them we gain much valuable information, relating to customs still retained.

The bounds of the archbishop's franchise are described, and it is called the Denne of Lydd, whence the word Denge-marsh is given to the marsh around.

The Denne is described as divided into two Juges, or Yeats, called in Latin *jugum terræ*; and the service that in old time was done, and had for the said land, was called "*averagium*," and was performed by cattle.

There are also, among the records, some tattered leaves of paper, written in the seventeenth century, being a copy of a series of curious memoranda relating to the history of the town and its manors.

It is therein stated that the origin of the seal of the Corporation was attributable to some wonderful exploit, by the Barons of Lydd, in the time of the Danish King Swaine, who, attempting to land at a place called "Waysend" with an army of Danes, were slain with great slaughter; and these memoranda describe how, within twenty years of the date thereof, there still remained two hills, or round banks, by the sea side, one whereof still then remained, which hills were full of dead men's bones; and the common report of the old men was, that they had heard their ancestors say they were the bones of Danes who were slain when attempting to land.

No trace can now be found of these hills, but I think they may have been near Jury's Gap, and were probably swept away, when Old Winchelsea and Broomhill were destroyed, in A.D. 1250. Broomhill at that time was a pretty little seaport town, much frequented. It had twenty-four taverns, and was a member of the port of Romney.

“Way’s End” is mentioned in the year 1473.

There are also several interesting notes, as to the rights of the inhabitants of Lydd to the ripe and common, and a shepherd was elected, yearly, to look after the town’s flock there. Very full and cogent reasons are given, in the time of Queen Elizabeth, why she had no claim to the ripe of Lydd.

The ancient custom of causing the great bell to be knell’d, with twelve strokes, on the first Saturday in every month, for sessions, is still maintained; and also the ringing of the curfew.