

A SERIES OF KENTISH HERALDIC FIRE-
BACKS, AND THE IDENTIFICATION OF
THE ARMS.*

BY H. S. COWPER, F.S.A.

I VENTURE to call attention to a Kentish series of heraldic fire-backs, and to propose a new identification for the coat of arms which decorates them. My notice was first called to the subject by my becoming possessed of one (No. 1 in list); and the great difficulty I experienced in the process of identification may be some excuse for bringing them before the Kent Archæological Society.

These fire-backs are of the sort made by casting from a sand-bed, on which has been impressed separate stamps or moulds, and not from one single mould. In this case there is only one stamp used—a shield of arms—the number of impressions and the arrangement varying somewhat according to size of the fire-back, as can be seen in the following list:—

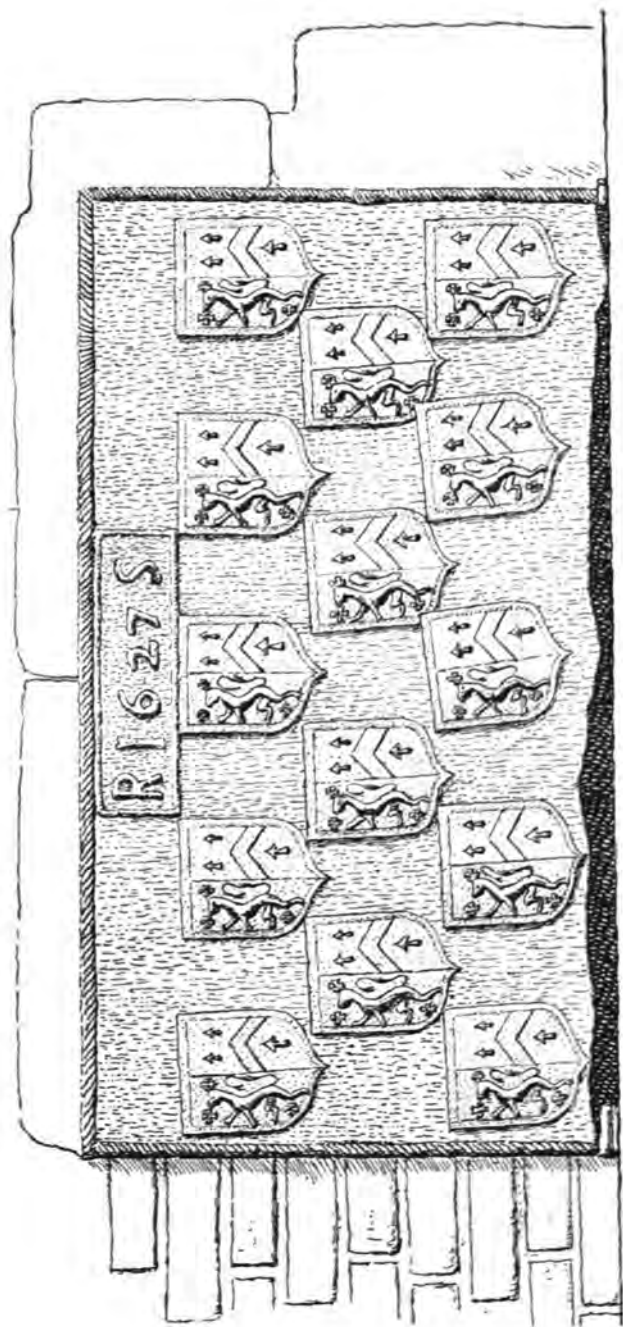
1. Now at Loddenden, Staplehurst, in possession of the writer; formerly at Great Cheveney, Marden. Fourteen shields in three rows: 5, 4, and 5. Cable-moulding round edge. Dimensions: 48 in. long, 26 in. high, 1½ in. thick (at edge). Inscribed: **R 1627 S**. (See **PLATE 4**.)

2. At Hawkhurst (Messrs. Pannett and Son, saddlers). Five shields: 2, 1, and 2. Dimensions: 57 in. long, 23 in. high, 2¼ in. thick. Inscribed: **T R 1633 S G**

A remarkably heavy example, badly preserved, but with holes in it apparently to run back the andirons into the wall behind when not in use.

3. Rawlinson, Rolvenden (the residence of Mrs. Tweedie). Similar to No. 1. Fourteen shields: 5, 4, and 5. Cable-moulding.

* Paper read before the Society at Maidstone, July 1909.



[68 in. by 26 in.]

KENTISH FIREBACKS:

FIREBACK AT GREAT LODDENDEEN, STAPLEBURST.

(In the Author's possession.)

Dimensions: 60 in. long, 30 in. high, 1 in. thick. Inscribed: **C 1603 T**. Formerly at the ancient farm called Rawlinson on the same estate.

4. Hole Park, Rolvenden (Sackville Cresswell, Esq.). Exactly similar to the last, but dated **C 1630 T**.

5. Headcorn Place (farm in the occupation of Mr. John Hosmer). Similar, but no date or initials. Dimensions: 44 in. long, 26 in. wide, 1 in. thick.

6. South Eastern Agricultural College, Wye. Fourteen shields: 5, 4, and 5. Cable-moulding. Dimensions: 48 in. long, $28\frac{1}{2}$ in. high, $1\frac{1}{8}$ in. thick. Inscribed: **C 1610 T**. (See a sketch in the College Prospectus.)

7. Edenbridge Manor Farm, in the possession of Captain Bathurst. Eight shields: 3, 2, and 3; between which are half-obliterated shields shewing lion only, making fifteen in all. Moulded border. No date or initials. Dimensions: 36 in. long, 24 in. high. (See Plate XX., Catalogue of Heraldic Exhibition at Burlington House.)

8. Kennington, near Ashford. Fifteen shields. Dated 1630.* (See "Iron-casting in the Weald," by Starkie Gardner, *Archæologia*, lvi. 146.)

9. Pounceford Farm. Seven shields. Dated 1629. (See Starkie Gardner, *op. cit.*)

The arms thus repeated, and apparently always from the same stamp, are: *A lion rampant between three crosses patée (or formée), impaling A chevron between three pheons reversed.* The dates between 1603 and 1633 and the initials, C T, R S, and T G, are apparently lightly sketched into the sand-bed with a pointed instrument.

Now, a prolonged search among Kentish arms failed to produce any person entitled to these arms, either with or without the initials, and the conclusion seemed inevitable that the arms were probably not Kentish, and that the initials were either those of ironfounders or owners of ironworks. Subsequently, however, I found the arms to be those of William Ayloff or Ayloff of Brettains or Brittainys in

* Numbers 7 and 8 also have apparently initials C T or T C. I have not seen them.

Hornchurch, co. Essex, who was a Judge of the Queen's Bench, and, I think, sheriff of his county, and of his wife Jane, the daughter of Sir Eustace Sulyard of Flemynghs in Runwell, also in Essex.*

But why should Kentish fire-backs, or at any rate fire-backs in Kent, be decorated with the shield of an Essex judge who seemingly had no connection with the district in which they occur? I felt that there must be a reason, and that it ought to be possible to find it.

It should be observed that all the instances I am able to quote are either in the Weald of Kent or close to its borders. This is a point to note, although of course future enquiries may produce examples from other areas.

William Ayloff was a member of an ancient family seated at that time in Essex, but said to have been originally of Kent; indeed, in the biography of him in Foss's *Judges of England* (v. 445), it is stated that the town of Wye belonged, *temp.* Henry VII., to the family of Ayloff, whose seat in the neighbourhood was called Bocton Aloph. This is interesting, since one of our examples (No. 5) is now at Wye College. But in Hasted's *Kent* I find nothing of Ayloffs either at Wye or Boughton Aluph, though possibly the Essex Ayloffs (whose complete pedigree I have not had an opportunity of studying) may have claimed descent from the Alulphus de Bocton mentioned in Hasted.†

Ayloff was called to the Bar 1560, Sergeant-at-Law 1577, and in 1579 he was Judge of Queen's Bench, that being probably the date of his appointment. In 1581 we find him sitting on a bench of judges in the case of Edmund Campion, the Jesuit missionary of Gregory XIII., who was in fact executed that year. A curious story is told by Ayloff's biographers how, at this trial, he, taking off his glove, found

* Arms of Ayloff: *Sable, a lion rampant between three crosses formée or* (Guillim, *Heraldry*). The same with *crosses potence* (Morant, *Essex*). *Sable, lion rampant between three crosses patte or* (Chobham Church, Surrey, 1570—90). Also the same of the judge himself, formerly in glass in Lincoln's Inn and Sergeants' Inn (Dugdale, *Origines Juridiciales*, 1671, pp. 240, 329, etc.). Arms of Sulyard: *Argent, a chevron gules between three pheons reversed sable* (Papworth's Ordinary, reference Glover's Ordinary, Cotton MS., Tiberius D. 16; Harl. MSS. 1392 and 1459). Sulyard of Wetherden: *Argent, a chevron gules between three pheons sable* (*Visitation of Suffolk*, 1561).

† Vol. vii. 385.

his hand bleeding and was unable to stanch the flow, a sign of the injustice which polluted the judgment seat.* He died in 1585.

But, besides this asserted Kentish origin for the Essex Ayloffs, we find Aliffes or Alefes, apparently of the same family, intermarrying into Kent. One Thomas Alefe or Aliffe (died 1529) married Margaret Chiche, sole heiress of Colsall in Milton, and the Ayloff arms are or were in Milton Church.† His only daughter Catherine married Richard Monins of Saltwood (died 3 Eliz., 1561), which family afterwards quartered the Ayloff arms, as will be seen in the Visitation of 1663. So this connection in no direct way can account for the judge's arms on the fire-backs.

Now it will be seen that five of the nine fire-backs are now in what may be called the Cranbrook area, that two or three come from further east, and one from the Weald (Edenbridge) much further west.‡ Therefore the evidence before us is in favour of their having been cast in the Hawkhurst-Marden-Headcorn-Rolvenden area; and, as a matter of fact, there were more than one ironworks in this district, though to a new-comer it is not easy to get reliable information about them.

Now we have seen that William Ayloff was one of the judges who took part in the administration of the severe laws passed against the Catholics in 1581, while this part of the Kentish Weald was an area that suffered exceptionally severely in the Marian persecution of the Protestants about twenty-four years earlier. At that date Sir John Baker, Recorder of London, Attorney-General, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Privy Councillor, etc. (in four reigns), held sway

* See *Dictionary Nat. Biog.*, under Ayloff; Foss, *Judges of England*, v. 455; Wright, *Essex*, ii. 443; Morant, *Essex*, ii. 42; Burke, *Extinct Baronetage*, 30; *Notes and Queries*, Second Series, iii. 376; and, for the part he played in the trial of Campion and other seminary priests, a pamphlet published at Paris: "An epistle of comfort to the Rev^d priests & to the Honourable Worshipful & other of the Laye sort restrayned in durance vile for the Catholic fayth."

† See also Hasted, vi. 184, also Harl. MS. 5520. The brass of Thomas Alefe himself was lost in Hasted's time, and also apparently the Alefe arms, which probably accounts for Hasted blazoning them as *crosses patée fichée*.

‡ I am not sure where Pounceford Farm (No. 9) is. No village is given in Mr. Gardner's Paper.

in his great house of Sissinghurst (only three miles from Cranbrook), and to him is still attributed locally the martyrdom of most of those who died for their religion at Maidstone. Numbers from the Wealden villages suffered thus at Maidstone and Canterbury, having first appeared before "bloody Baker," and their names are still remembered. And, as is well known, a bitter feeling against any form of Roman worship still exists throughout the Weald.*

Now by about 1600, when these fire-backs begin, Sir John Baker had gone to his fathers, and his son Sir Richard reigned at Sissinghurst, an ironmaster owning furnace and forge, and broad acres too, in Cranbrook and Hawkhurst.† What this Sir Richard's religious bias was I do not know, but I think we may rest assured that these fire-backs do not come from his foundries, nor the iron probably from his forges. There were other forges and furnaces in the district, and I think close by; and I think some ironmaster or founder must have procured this Ayloff stamp, and we can imagine him loudly advertising his goods: "Buy our good Protestant fire-backs, and have nothing to do with those turned out from Butcher Baker's iron." It was in fact a sort of trade-mark, like the modern "English make" we find stamped on trade articles now; and sell well they probably did, or we should not find them scattered about still. I doubt not the Ayloff design became popular and fashionable.

In vain, however, have I endeavoured to identify the initials or the foundry where these backs were cast. There were indeed several families near Cranbrook, who were influential (more or less), with the initials G and S—Guldeford, Sharpe or Sharpeigh, Stringer, and Sheafe, the last three being clothiers I believe. Sir Richard Sackville also had works in various parts of Sussex and Kent. But it is, I think, more probable that the initials are those of the actual founders, not the ironmasters; and, indeed, the initials C T, which occur on numbers 3, 4, and 6, are said to be the

* See Furley, *Hist. of the Weald*, ii. 676.

† *Idem*, ii. 486.

initials of the founders of some of the Wadhurst cast grave-slabs.*

It is not the first time these fire-backs have been before the antiquarian public, though of this I was quite unaware until I had been working at the subject, and was indeed about to write these notes. Two of these fire-backs (Nos. 6 and 7 of my list) appeared in the Heraldic Exhibition at Burlington House in 1894, and in the illustrated catalogue No. 7 forms the subject of Plate XX.† Both in the catalogue and in the plate they are described as shewing the impaled arms of Delawar, as if the identification was not open to question. Four years later Mr. J. Starkie Gardner adopted this identification in his Paper on *Iron-casting in the Weald*, in which a paragraph is devoted to this series, beginning "The first private shield met with is that of the De la Warrs, extensive landowners in Sussex."‡

Now the Delawars were the early owners of the ancient estate of Delawar in Brasted near Hever, but they died out there at an early date, and the property passed to Paulins of Paulin's, and from them to the Seyliards of Seyliard, on brasses of which family at Edenbridge we find the arms of Delawar quartered. These Delawar coats, though there are slight variations, are not the same as the coat on the fire-back, though there is some similarity. On one brass (1558) we find, *Within a bordure invected (or engrailed) a lion rampant between seven crosses-crosslet*; and on another (1611), *A lion rampant between eight crosses-crosslet*, perhaps more correctly blazoned *Crusily, a lion rampant*. I can hardly doubt that it was the existence of one of the fire-backs at Edenbridge that led to this identification of the arms as those of Delawar. It is curious too that the Delawar estate passed to Seyliard of Kent, while the judge impaled the arms of Sulyard of Essex; and this, I think, added

* *Archæologia*, lvi. 146.

† Nos. 152 and 153.

‡ *Archæologia*, lvi. 146. Since writing the above I have received a kind letter from Mr. S. Gardner on the subject, and from this it appears that No. 3, from Rolyenden, has been previously described by Mr. R. Blomfield. The identification of the arms as Delawar, however, seems to have been first made in the Catalogue of the Heraldic Exhibition.

to the confusion. But the arms of Seyliard of Seyliard are quite different: *Azure, a chief ermine.**

Another point may perhaps be mentioned. Mr. Miller Christy, to whom I mentioned the series in correspondence, tells me that the repeating a small device (heraldic or otherwise) many times on a fire-back was not uncommon in the sixteenth century, but was unusual in the seventeenth century; and he evidently thinks that the stamp or pattern itself belongs to the period of the judge. In this I am inclined to agree, and it is quite possible that earlier-dated examples will now be noted. I should be glad to hear of any such.

In conclusion, I must thank the following gentlemen who most kindly helped me in the search when my own library was warehoused, and I had little leisure: Mr. Harold Sands, F.S.A.; Mr. A. L. Hardy, the Treasurer of the Manorial Society; Mr. G. F. T. Beale of Biddenden; and Mr. E. N. Swainson, who first called my attention to the Alefe arms as a quartering of Monins of Saltwood. And I must thank Mrs. Tweedie of Rawlinson, Rolvenden, Mr. Creswell of Hole Park, and Mr. Hosmer of Headcorn Place, for permitting me to examine the fire-backs in their possession, and the Principal of Wye College for information about No. 6.

It should perhaps be added that No. 3 has recently been described in a popular book, printed at Ashford, and the arms incorrectly ascribed to the family of Gibbons.

POSTSCRIPT.—Since writing the above I have discovered two more examples—one in the Victoria and Albert Museum, only 3 ft. by 1 ft. 7 in., with five shields, and the top corners cut off instead of being left square; and another near Tenterden, with the initials R 1627 S and, I think, fourteen shields.

* See the pedigree of the Seyliards of Delawar in parish of Brasted (with that of the Delawars, *temp.* Ric. I. to Edward II.) in Howard and Crisp's *Visitation of Kent*, 1663—68 (London, 1887). The pedigree is from an old one in possession of R. Carter Petley, Esq., and in it the arms of Delawar are given: *Gew. crosses crussule (i.e., orusily or semée of crosses-crosslet) and a lion rampant argent.* See also Hasted, iii. 154.