THE ANNALS OF THE TOWN AND PORT OF NEW ROMNEY

WITH SOME EXTRACTS FROM THE RECORDS OF THE TOWN.

Summary of a paper read before the Kent Archæological Society, by the Mayor of New Romney,

MAJOR M. TEICHMAN-DERVILLE, M.A., O.B.E.,

July 25th, 1929.

It has been my privilege to welcome you to-day as a Society once again to our Romney Marsh, alleged to contain (to say nothing of our sheep) more old churches, Cinque Port Barons, Level Commissioners, Lords of Manors, Mayors, Bailiffs, Justices and Jurats, than any other area of similar size in the kingdom.

All these relics of olden time, we have been able to show you. To-night I have been asked to tell you a little about our old Town and Port of New Romney, and the records we are still fortunate enough to possess.

About Romney in very early times, little is known, but in olden days, the River which we now know as the Rother, found its way to the sea in a winding channel, close to where Romney now stands, forming an estuary between the low hills, which are still a feature of the ground to the south-west of our town.

The Saxons on their arrival established themselves on the rising ground near the river mouth, and round their Christian Church or oratory of St. Martin our town of New Romney was gradually built.

The origin of the name Romney has long been a subject of controversy among archæologists. It is, I think, now generally agreed that the Saxons finding the old Celtic word

"Rum" meaning "marsh," in use for the district, adopted the name for their settlement, adding to it the various Saxon terminations which we find used in their early Charters. The actual spelling of the name differs in various ages from the early Anglo-Saxon Rumenea, and Ruminingseta, to the Romenel of Domesday, the Rumenal, Romenel, Romenhale of the thirteenth century, the Romene of the early middle ages, and the New Romney of later days.

Actual records of the Town and Port in early times are few, though the name occurs in several Saxon Charters from the eighth century onwards. It was the port selected by the Danes for their great invasion in 893, when their fleet sailed up the river and sacked Apuldor, though the fate of Romney is not mentioned in the Saxon Chronicle.

A little later by the time of Ethelread the Second our town must have become an important trading port, as during his reign the Burgesses of New Romney first began issuing coins from their own mint, continuing to do so under all his Saxon and Danish successors.

Quantities of our Saxon coins have recently been discovered in Northern Europe, and it is evident that Romney trade in those days went far afield. By far the commonest types in this country, however, are the coins of Edward the Confessor, and the two issues of William the Conqueror.

In Edward the Confessor's reign Romney must have further developed and it was certainly one of our chief Ports on the South Coast, when Godwin, Earl of Kent, and his sons in the year 1053, seized all the ships in the harbour.

The extended nature of the port of Romney in those days and the length of shore available for landing or wharfage, is testified by the name Langport, which the manor had obtained at the time of the Domesday Survey, and which gave the hundred its name.

Not many years later, our town played a gallant part in resisting the Norman invasion, and we read that when a portion of William's fleet attempted to enter the harbour, it was the men of Romney that repelled the invaders, and drew the first Norman blood—an episode that unfortunately

did not go unscathed, for after the battle of Hastings, the Conqueror made a point of marching first to Romney, and taking his revenge upon the inhabitants.

Whatever may be the true story, to quote the words of Mr. Burrows, "the resistance and punishment of Romney contrasted gloriously from an English point of view, with the behaviour of the rest of the Ports."

Our town evidently recovered quickly, for a few years later in the Domesday Survey, it is found flourishing again, enjoying the earlier of those privileges subsequently granted to the Cinque Ports, and with Dover and Sandwich distinguished from the rest of the ports, as directly "in the King's hand" for sea service.

Records show our Romney sailors played their full part in all the desperate sea battles and adventures of the Cinque Port Fleet in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Romney had her share of Royal and other visits. Thus, in 1165, when Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, thought it safer to fly from the King's displeasure, it was to his port of Romney that he came, "apud Romenel villam suam," to take ship to cross to France. Twice he is said to have set sail from our harbour, but, driven back by contrary winds and high seas, he eventually abandoned the attempt. Another and less creditable version of the story, however, is that the Romney sailors, fearing to offend the King, so far forgot their allegiance to their Archbishop as to make the stormy weather an excuse for not venturing on the Channel crossing.

A few years later King John himself paid a lengthy visit to our Town, and his special Charter to his men of Romney, granting them their Cinque Port privileges, is our earliest Charter of which the exact wording has been preserved.

During the thirteenth century there are records of various terrible storms when the sea broke in, and flooded the marsh, destroying towns and ruining the land.

Romney appears to have suffered most from that so-called "hideous tempest," of 1287, when the sea is said to have flowed twice without ebbing. Our church as you will have noticed, and some of our older houses, still stand several feet

below the level of the surrounding ground, as a result largely of the deposit left when this dreadful storm and flood abated. But what was still worse, the River Rother was found to have changed its course, and to have made for itself a new passage to the sea, under the walls of Rye.

This was the beginning of the end of Romney as a harbour, for though during succeeding generations, continuous attempts were made to keep a channel open by means of sluices and extensive digging operations, it was eventually abandoned as an impossibility. The old course of the Channel, or Canal, can still be traced in the narrow field that runs along the side of the Rhee wall, but as the banks fell in and silted up, the resultant ground became a source of controversy between Romney and the Crown, as to ownership—a dispute that was not finally settled until Queen Elizabeth's time, by the Charter which you have seen this afternoon giving "the land between the walls," once for all, to the town.

Across this channel several wooden bridges were built, one called Hornesbrygge, towards Apuldore, one at Old Romney, and the most important from our town's point of view, one at Hammond's Corner built in 1388, called Island or Islesbridge, because of the small island which then existed in the middle of the stream.

Our actual town records, believed to be the finest continuous series in existence, begin in 1352 (Edward III.) with a small book in sixteenth century binding, decorated with the arms of the Mayor of the Town and Port of New Romney, curiously enough at present reposing in the library of St. Catherine's College, Cambridge.

It consists of 105 leaves of parchment, written principally in old Norman French (photographs of which have been shown you) and is apparently a register of Daniel Rough, Common Clerk of New Romney, one of the earliest predecessors of Mr. Lamacraft in that office.

This volume contains what are described as the "usages of Romene," "from time out of memory there used." The whole book abounds in interesting details of old Romney life,

dealing at times with personal squabbles of Romney fishermen with their neighbours from Hythe and Lydd over their nets, at times with the town's more important relations to their Lord Warden and their overlord, the Archbishop of Canterbury.

To cut down our Romney trees, even in those far-off days seems to have been a heinous offence, for in the fourteenth century we find the following enactment made by the Jurats of Romney. "If a person be found cutting wood within the franchise, he is to have the pillory the first time, his ear cut off, and to be taken to the other end of the town and made to abjure it. On the second occasion he is to lose the other ear, and on the third offence to be punished with death."

Daniel Rough's Journal carries our history down to the year 1379, when the earliest Assessment book actually in our Town's possession begins. This volume was fifty years ago restored and translated by Mr. Riley, of the Historical Manuscripts Commission.

The first entry is the Assessment of Romney for the Poll-Tax, which led to Wat Tyler's rebellion. All men and women, exceeding the age of fifteen, were forced to contribute. Fourteen Wards are enumerated in the return, and the number of persons mentioned is about a thousand.

Apart from these lists, the chief matter of general interest is the account of the fitting out and provisioning of the barge, which New Romney was ordered to provide for fetching Queen Eleanor from Calais. The ship was unfortunately wrecked off the French Coast on her outward voyage, and the crude methods employed by the men of Romney to salvage her, by submerging numbers of empty wine-barrels, were unluckily unsuccessful.

Crude, also, to our modern ideas, were the means taken by the men of Romney in those days for securing verdicts in their favour, and when a case was pending before Sir Robert Ashton the Lord Warden, the following entry appears: "given to the said Sir Robert, that he might be aiding us in the matter, 60 shillings." The matter must have been very pressing, for they also gave "to one Whitehead,

butler of the said Lord, that he might speak for us good words on the matter—20 pence."

Nor was the Lord Warden the only man so favoured, for when another important cause was to be heard before the Archbishop of Canterbury a year or so later, New Romney apparently being in some doubt as to the result, considered it necessary to lay out 40/8d. in wine for His Grace, "for obtaining a favourable rule," not to mention frequent other presents "that we might have his good friendship" of cygnets, capons, and even such doubtful delicacies as cranes, porpoises, and dolphins.

This first volume ends in 1384, and is followed by two more Assessment Books, which carry the town's history down to the nineteenth year of Henry VIII, 1527. They are full of interesting details.

From the Assessment Lists perhaps some of the curious names with which the Romney boys and girls were christened in those days may be mentioned. The following female names occur frequently: Anabilia, Avice, Bretonissa, Celestria, Godlena, Deonissia, Edonia, Justina, Magota, Tephina, Parnel, and Petronella. The male names approximate more closely to those now in use, though we have several Brices, Hamos, and Odigars.

It is also interesting to note the distances from which people travelled in those days in order to become freemen of Romney, and to qualify themselves for the privileges conferred by the freedom of our old Cinque Port town. Not only in the fifteenth century were the great Kentish families of Dering and Knatchbull proud to become freemen of Romney, but we read of applicants hailing from as far west as Hereford and Glastonbury, and as far north as Northampton, and even Alnwick and Scotland.

Residence in Romney was not an essential qualification and it is recorded in 1496 that Richard Knatchbull of Mersham (for Knatchbulls owned and lived at Mersham Hatch even in those days) was admitted to the Freedom as an "extravagans," or freeman living beyond the liberty, for which he had to pay an extra 4d. yearly.

Even Romney freemen, however, did not always take kindly to the contributions levied by the Jurats of their town for the provision of the common-ship, and in 1404 there is an entry that "John Mokayt was arrested, imprisoned and fined 6/8d." "for that he had wished that all the Jurats of Romene had been burnt together in the common ship" which he confessed and was put upon security for his future good behaviour. A few years later Walter Harwarstok was similarly treated because "with opprobrious and crooked words he had vilified the venerable Jurat James Tièce."

Strict too, were the ordinances of these days against profiteering. In 1413, John, son of Roger Payne, was brought before the Jurats, "because against the custom of the town, he bought 7,000 fresh herrings, and there retailed them to freemen and others at a higher price than he bought them, in a selfish manner, which he confessed, and was fined 20 pence."

Nor were the licensing regulations less severe, for the following year we read "that it was ordered and enacted by the Bailiff and Jurats of the town of Romney, that all priests and those who commonly frequent taverns, should be in their houses where they ought to pass the night, at 9 o'clock at the outside, under penalty of 6/8d."

In 1517 occurs the following curious entry: "Paid to Thomas Beanquike for watching Richard Pever, the vicar, when he was in Smallisporte, for his demerits—6d." "Smallisporte" was the name by which the prison by the Town Hall was known.

But our governing body in those days did not confine itself to trading and licensing regulations. In 1490 there is an entry to the effect that the Corporation expended the large amount of 4d. on erecting a Ducking or "Kuckinge Stole," but subsequently had to pay a man 5d. "for putting a woman on the same." This form of correction continued in Romney till Tudor times, and one poor lady is so unlucky as to have her name immortalised in the following entry: "Paid for drawing the ducking or cocking stoole to duck Joan Adams for her scolding 12d."

It must however have been some consolation to the henpecked husbands of New Romney to think how much better off they were in this respect than their neighbours at Hythe ; for in the records of the latter town it is written that in 1412 " Joan, wife of John Mersch, is found to be a common scold, and her *husband* has to pay 3/4 penalty."

The morals of our young men were also well looked after. In the Corporation's accounts we find several references to fines imposed for playing at " le cardes," and the New Romney apprentice indentures of the fifteenth century specially stipulate that the apprentices " are not to play at dice, chance, nor chess, nor habitually frequent the tavern." They were further during their time of service not only forbidden to contract marriage with any woman, but they might not even, " betrothe themselves to any." Fines too for being out late at night in New Romney were imposed as late as 1599 with unusual severity as is shown by an entry in that year. " Received of John Goddarde for a fyne for his night walking contrarie to the decrees of this town XXs."

Among the loose documents of the period was the original of the proclamation of the pardon issued in favour of Jack Cade under his assumed name of Mortimer, July 7th, 1450. This document has not been traced, but among other references to Cade's insurrection, it appears that apart from the treason of his politics and the use of magical books, he was accused of having " rered upp the Divell in the semblaunce of a blak dogge, in his chamber, where he was loggyd at Derteford," and our assessment books contain the following entry : " given to a man for carrying a quarter of a man to supersede the said quarter 3/4d." In other words the man was bribed to carry his hideous burden, part of the body of one of the rebels, out of Romney and deposit it elsewhere.

Throughout our old records there are constant mentions of the performances of plays, for which the New Romney actors appear specially to have been famed. The people of Romney were certainly provided with plenty of entertainment, as there are constant references to payments by the

corporation to the "men of Lydd, Bethersden, Brookland, St. Mary's, Hythe," and others, for the performances of their plays—as well as disbursements to "minstrels," "of our lord the King," "our Lord Warden," "our Lord Admiral," "our Lord Cardinal" and others.

On these occasions scaffolds were erected on Crockley Green as stages, and warders of the play appointed to keep order—doubtless quite a necessary precaution, for in 1495 we read that the players of "our Lord the prince" were accompanied to Romney by a baboon, and there are various references to the bears shown by the King's bearward.

In the fifteenth century, Thomas Caxtone, supposed to be a near relation of William Caxton the printer, filled the office of Town Clerk from time to time in our town. We have several books written in his vigorous and legible hand. He lived also at Lydd and Sandwich, and must have been of a deeply religious frame of mind, as at the top of each page of his accounts, the letters J.H.U. (Jesu) appear.

The Assessment Books continue our records down to the year 1527. It may be mentioned that in order to make this series more accessible to the student, a translation of these books has been recently typed out "in extenso."

By this date, 1527, the town's accounts were becoming more intricate, the meetings of the governing body more formal, and the cases decided by the New Romney Courts more numerous, and more complicated. Consequently, from Elizabeth's reign, we find our Town's records divided into three classes of books. The old Assessment Books are now continued by a series of volumes, designated Chamberlain's Accounts (which run from 1528-1818). The Proceedings of the Town Council are kept in a separate series of volumes, entitled "Common Assembly Books" (which continue till 1873) while a magnificent series of Court Books, comprising in one set the judicial proceedings held at Romney, in another Records of Plaints, and in a third a Register of Deeds, are kept in detail till the nineteenth century.

The next landmark in the town's history is its incorporation under Queen Elizabeth in 1563, when John Cheesman

was appointed our first Mayor by Royal Charter. Up till this time, Romney had had to be content with a Bailiff, appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, as their chief Magistrate. Dissatisfaction with this arrangement had long existed, as our subservience to Canterbury had deprived our town of a Mayor, without ever offering any corresponding advantages, in fact rather the reverse, since the bailiff was primarily the Archbishop's, and not the Town's representative, and the dread was ever present of encroachments by Canterbury on our Cinque Port Liberties.

Matters indeed had once previously come to a head in 1484 in the reign of Richard III, when, during the wars of Roses, the men of Romney, considering the time propitious, took upon themselves to elect a Mayor.

John Cheynewe, Bailiff for that year appears to have been selected, and not only did he style himself "Mayor," but he went so far as to send to Canterbury to get a silver mace made, also incurring "for the expenses of John Castelake riding to Canterbury, about the said mace, 9 days, 5/7d." He was not, however, officially recognised, and in the same year, as soon as the country became settled after the Battle of Bosworth, the following significant entry occurs: "Paid the expenses of Adam Tuter, when he brought a privy seal to Depose the Mayor. 18d." After this fiasco, no further attempt was made, and our official incorporation in Queen Elizabeth's time was all the more appreciated.

The election of the Mayor always took place in the Parish Church, as you may have noticed from the tomb in the Chancel; and when Mr. Walter in 1776, owing to the gout, had to be sworn in to the office of Mayor in his own chamber, it was recorded as a very exceptional occurrence.

Although in Tudor times, Romney can have been of no importance as a harbour, we find that relics of the old Cinque Port Ship Service still remained, and in the year of the Spanish Armada we were ordered to put forth a ship, to join the Fleet in the Channel. To meet this demand, it was found necessary to hire a ship, "warlikely furnished," at a cost of approximately £300. The vessel selected for

the purpose was the "John of Chichester," but owing to disputes with the men of Lydd and Old Romney for not contributing their proper share, the owner, it seems, never received the full amount.

To most Englishmen any mention of the Spanish Armada seems inseparably connected with the idea of the game of Bowls and Drake at Plymouth Hoe—and it was just a year before, in 1587 that our first Romney Bowling Club was started, when the corporation paid "to Andrew Vynall for enclosing the Bowling Green—12d."

But although regular Ship Service was now a thing of the past, Romney and the other Cinque Ports found a new outlet for any military inclinations they still possessed in the selected trained bands, which each port maintained. It was not, however, till Tudor times that these selected companies appear to have been organised on a proper basis, and our records include the Muster Rolls of the New Romney detachment, from 1569 for the next two centuries. In Queen Elizabeth's reign, our selected band consisted of four officers, ten men armed with corselettes, twenty-six Musketeers, fourteen Caliver men, thirteen single pike men, ten Bill men, and one light horse. In a Muster Roll of 1583, John Southland is mentioned as answering correctly for "a bill, a bow, a sheaff of arrows, a spade and a shovell"—quite a new aspect of the founder of our well-known Grammar School. In 1588, William Southland, another of the family, was Captain of our selected band, and had the oversight of our beacon and of the "helmes bekene."

In connection with these beacons, we have various references throughout the records relating to the cost of making our own beacon at the north end of the town, and for the other beacon for which we were responsible, in the helmes or sandhills near the sea. The watching of these beacons must have been thirsty work, and the corporation evidently regarded it as such, as we find entries of considerable amounts spent for wine "upon the mershmen," for watching the "bekones," and neglect to tend them was seriously punished. On special occasions it is

recorded that an additional beacon used to be made on the top of the tower of our Church of St. Nicholas. Entries such as the following in 1513 show the importance attached to the system of beacons along our coasts: "Paid to a man bringing a letter from Lord Howard the Admiral for watching the bekones for the Scottes and Frenchmen. 8d."

But to return to the selected bands mentioned, these were in the late eighteenth century turned into a force called the New Romney Fencible Cavalry, designated "The Duke of York's Own" commanded by Col. Cholmondeley-Dering. It may surprise some to learn that our Romney soldiers at that time served as far afield as Ireland. It cannot be said, however, that military activities were ever any more popular in Romney than they are now, and when our townsmen were being called up in 1810, to defend the country against the threatened Napoleonic invasion, the Mayor of that day received such threatening anonymous letters from "conscientious objectors" that he was obliged to apply to the Home Secretary for protection.

The earliest attempt to make a list of the records of the town was made in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and is written in a curious old parchment covered volume, called the Book of Notte, which unfortunately has been much gnawed by mice. Many of the items enumerated are still preserved, such as the brasen horn, the custumal, a bundle of proclamations, and various other documents, but the mace of silver mentioned (doubtless the one made for the would-be Mayor), has disappeared. Gone also is the Romney Play-Book, which was evidently much prized, as we read that in 1516, it was handed to Arthur Bee, the Common Clerk of those days, "to be safely and securely kept to the use and behoof of the town." The contents of the Romney Play Book are not known, except in so far that the performances were in the nature of miracle or passion plays.

Throughout our records there occur frequent references to regulations made in respect of our New Romney dogs. Dogs indeed would appear to have been a source of considerable worry to the corporation from the earliest days. As

early as 1414, in Henry V's reign, an order was made that all cur dogs (*scuriles*) should be expelled from the town, or at least safely kept so that they do no harm, under penalty of 20d. Some hundred years later is an entry that one Mannings was paid 12d. for his wages as dog whipper to the town—evidently rather a risky occupation, for shortly afterwards the following entry occurs: "payd to Robt. Pell for looking to Mannings' legges XXs." Mannings evidently recovered from the bite, and lived to a ripe old age, for we find the town continuing his salary as official dog whipper for many subsequent years.

In another entry in the Book of Notte it is stated "on the thirde day of January 1579 was the decree for dogges red and proclaymed in the churche of St. Nycholas after Evensonge that all inhabitants of Newe Romney disposed to kept any dogg or curr, shoulde before the XIIth of the said month enter their dogges and after observe the decrees in ordere as they were red, uppon payne in those decrees expressed. These were admitted to keep dogges. John Cheseman Mayor—a great balde branded mastiff, William Epps Jurat, 3 red spannelles, one bitch all spoted red. William Southland Jurat, a white mastiff dog w$^{th.}$ a black eare and a black spot in the rumpe." Another owner was permitted to keep "a black spanelle w$^{th.}$ a whyt garland about ye neck, a grey hounde whelp black w$^{th.}$ iii whyte feete and a whyt typpe of the taile." Another "a red cur wthout a taile, a mongrell bitch grey faced somewhat white uppon the brest."

But it is with the expenditure and receipt of our Town's income that the Chamberlain's accounts chiefly deal. This Income was derived principally from the letting of the Corporation lands, and from the leases of the various Kiddell or fishing grounds, it being always provided that "the Mayor, Jurats and all other gentlemen of the town and port, should have all the turbot and mullets as they shall think fit, at 3d. per lb. for mullet and 1½d. per lb for turbot."

The Town Windmill, which stood until recently at the north end of the town, must also have been profitable, and

we have continuous references to it from the earliest days. Special Committees were appointed for its letting and repair, and in those days, when corn was grown in great quantities on the Marsh, it was one of the town's most valuable possessions. It is amusing to read the almost affectionate terms used in reference to our old mill when in 1794 it was decided to rebuild it, "she being in very bad repair, her main post being decayed, and she being so old and worn out."

In the fourteenth century, however, as many as five windmills are mentioned in our records, and the town mill of which we have been speaking must have been the last survival of a once flourishing milling trade.

Another source of income, which we still possess in a small degree, were the rabbit warrens on the sandhills. Not only was a keeper paid for guarding the rabbits, but we actually read of land being inned and reclaimed at the Warren "in order that it might afford increased food for our stock of conies."

The expenditure, however, of our income was not supervised as it is now. Not only do we gather that the Corporation almost invariably let the Town lands to members of their own body—doubtless at a very favourable rent, but large sums also were expended on their personal entertainment.

In 1646, when Colonel Brown sent a buck to the Corporation, it was "thereuppon ordered that an ordinary of 12d. be provided against tomorrow noon, and that as well the freemen and their wives as strangers be invited to eat thereof, and that every couple shall be allowed a pint of wine, at the cost and charges of the Corporation." This was probably the origin of the Corporation's famous venison feast held annually on September 22nd, and only finally abolished in 1797.

That, however, was only one of our Corporation's feasts, and in 1764, a decree was passed that a steady sum should be allowed out of the town's funds, "to be spent on entertainments on Kinge's days, but only the body corporate

invited thereto," altho' hogsheads of beer were provided for the common people.

There must have been a good deal of ale consumed in Romney in the old days. 1530 is the date proverbially assigned for the introduction of Beer into England. Romney was, however, well in advance of the times, for a hundred years before that date, in 1427, it was ordered that "two men called ale conners shall be chosen to strain and taste the beer made in the town, the makers of the beer to send for the tasters to approve the same, and if good upon proof, they shall sell it for a penny-halfpenny and no more, if not good, then at a penny." Another enactment in 1528, just a hundred years later, provides that all beer is to be sold in Romney at three quarts for a penny, and that any housewife that infringes this order is to be fined 12d. and give up her Tavern. Beer certainly seems to have been cheap enough in those days, and there was evidently plenty of still stronger drink, as our records as far back as 1359 show our Town cellars well stocked with Gascon Wine.

Nor could the men of Romney in olden times complain of any lack of Taverns in which to refresh themselves. Not only were such inns as our present "New Inn" flourishing from early days, but a number of taverns are mentioned which have long since disappeared, but which in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries must have been quite important houses. The sessions meeting used to dine sometimes at "the Sign of the Rose and Crown," sometimes at "the Sign of the Queen's Head." The general muster and his Lordship's company are entertained now at "the Sign of the Dolphin," now at "the Sign of the George," while one of the most famous of Romney's old inns rejoiced in the somewhat fantastic name of "at the Sign of the Golden Bacchus."

Throughout our records frequent references are made to the Warren Salts; the range of shingle and sand banks, which we still know by that name, and a large portion of which even now belongs to the town. In early days, the sea must have come up nearly to the line where the Dymchurch

road now runs, as we read of permission granted to place capstans on it for winding up the fishing boats.

On reclaimed Warren land was situate the Romney race course, where for many years in the eighteenth century a race meeting was annually held for a cup of gilt plate given by the corporation, at that time evidently somewhat more sportingly inclined than now in dealing with our bank balances.

On the Warren also stood the building known as the "pest house," erected in 1742 as an early isolation hospital for sufferers from any "pestilential disorder." No trace of the appointment of a Medical officer of Health can be found in the records, but that does not mean that our Mayors neglected the health of the town. In 1609 when the plague was raging there is an entry of items paid to two men "to mind and keep the people of St. Mary's from coming to this town for that divers people of St. Mary's had died of the plague."

As to Romney's Parliamentary representation, our records do not furnish us with any return until the year 1360 (in Edward III's reign), but from that year onwards (except apparently for a short period during the Commonwealth) Romney regularly sent two representatives to Parliament, until the old Borough was disfranchised by the Reform Bill of 1832. Up to Tudor times, as long as Romney was a sea port of some importance, her members of Parliament seem to have consisted chiefly of the most important people living in the town, the Bailiff, or Mayor, being usually one of them. After James I's reign, however, local celebrities disappear from the roll, and for the next two hundred years, the representation of the town appears to have been confined to the leading county families.

The right of electing two Barons to represent us in Parliament was one of the most valued of our town's privileges. In 1683, when Charles II assumed the office of Lord Warden he asserted a pretended right to nominate one of our barons. This claim Romney "after a diligent survey of our ancient books and records," refused to recognise. Mr. Harris in his history a hundred years later

prints the whole correspondence and adds the following comment, "This was a very honest effort in those terrible times. How many of the other Ports besides this gallant little town refused to comply with the demands of the Crown, I cannot find, but I am informed none of them did." Romney can well be proud to have been singled out a second time by historians from the rest of the Ports (as in the case of the Norman invasion), on account of gallant behaviour in the face of overwhelming odds.

It is, however, round the Church of St. Nicholas that from the twelfth century onwards, the life of New Romney has centred. Not only was this Church used for all our most important civil functions, such as the election of the Mayor and the granting of the Freedom, but in early days the regular sessions of the Jurats and the Annual Cinque Port Meetings were usually held in it, as being the most convenient place for such gatherings. This use of our Church for civil functions was not without its drawbacks to the officiating clergy, and in 1407 there is an entry of a receipt of a free gift of 3s. 4d. from John Hacche, the vicar of Romene with a request "that the Jurats in future shall not hold their session in this church, at the same time as Divine Service is being celebrated."

St. Nicholas, it must be remembered, was only one of the five churches which New Romney possessed in pre-Reformation days. By far our oldest church was that of St. Martin, which took its name from the oratory dedicated to that Saint in Saxon days, to which reference is made in King Ethelbert's grant of 740. This church stood at no great distance to the north of our present parish church, but as early as the sixteenth century it appears to have been neglected.

In 1550 it is recorded that the Bailiffs and Jurats of the town sent a petition to Archbishop Cranmer asking for permission to dismantle it, and to take St. Nicholas for their only parish church, "for that the town is not so populous, nor the devotions of the people so liberal in paying of personal tithe, as they have been heretofore, and the profits of the same are not sufficient nor able to find two curates to serve

both churches." The petition was granted, and in the following year, St. Martin's was dismantled, and the timber, bricks, stones, and tiles, sold for a total sum of £136 16s. 10d., detailed accounts of which are still in existence, and "the money employed towards relief of the common poor and best profit of the town and parish."

The comparative degradation suffered by our most ancient Church of St. Martin, and its subservience to the newer foundation of St. Nicholas is remarkable. As early as 1511, however, in Archbishop Warham's Visitation, it had been reported as "in bad repair and decay." It has been conjectured that the church may have become unpopular owing to the fact that the great storm of 1287 which ruined Romney as a port arose at Martinmas, or it is possible that the church itself was more damaged than that of St. Nicholas during the inundation and never properly repaired.

Our other church, that of St. Laurence, with its high tower in which the town clock was long kept, stood to the west of St. Nicholas, and seems to have been more used and better esteemed by the people of Romney in the fifteenth century, than that of St. Martin; we have no record of the date it was actually dismantled, but this foundation was also reported as in a bad state of repair in the early sixteenth century and was evidently deserted soon after.

One curious feature in connexion with this church seems to have been that it possessed no graveyard. The parishioners of St. Laurence usually in their wills, directed that they should be interred in the cemetery of the Church of St. John the Baptist. This so-called Church of St. John the Baptist was really only the chapel of the ancient Priory of that name, which had been founded in Romney for regular canons in the thirteenth century. We can trace from our records that services were continued in the Chapel up to the middle of the fifteenth century, and there is still a site in New Romney known as St. John's Churchyard.

Quite recently, when foundations were being dug in this field, a number of bones and skeletons was exhumed, which have since been re-interred in consecrated ground.

The Chapel of the Lepers Hospital provided Romney in the old days with its fifth church. In accordance with Pope Alexander III's IXth Canon "*De Leprosis*", all leper spitles were bound to have their own chapels, and lepers were forbidden to frequent any other church. This hospital fell into ruin in the eleventh century, but was re-founded in 1363 by John Fraunceys, an early Bailiff of Romney, as a chapel with a master and chaplain to conduct daily services, "for the souls of the founder and his kin." Situated in the district we now know as Spital Lane, it is still shown as a church in 1614 in an old map made at that date, for Magdalen College, Oxford, to whom in 1481 the land and chapel had been annexed.

From the number of churches mentioned it might fairly be inferred that Romney in those days was not only deeply religious but stood high in the Archbishop's favour. Twice however has the town been laid under an Interdict and all divine service temporarily stopped, once in 1388 owing to some infringement by the Jurats of the rights of the Archbishop, as their feudal Lord.

And a second time in Edward IV's reign in the fifteenth century when the Lord Cardinal's displeasure again appears to have been incurred, and some sort of a ban placed on the Town, which was not removed till 1475. In that year there are various references to the "Time of the Absolution of the Town." In what the actual ceremony consisted is not clear, but we gather from the records that suitable entertainment was provided for the church dignitaries who attended the function. Among others curiously enough the Bishop of Norwich appears on this occasion to have paid a visit to Romney. He was evidently favourably impressed, as in the next year there is an entry of his admission to the freedom of the Town.

In 1664, Mr. Balstock, the Vicar, absented himself so much that his parishioners were induced to write him the following letter. "We much wonder that (keeping still in your hands the vicarage of New Romney) you can be content to receive tithes, but you will neither reside in your

benefice yourself, nor provide a curate. We have been wholly destitute since Christmas day last, tho' from your departure, till then, we had indeed a nimble curate, who read Divine Service once every Lord's Day, and was usually in his sermon and prayer before it, about ¼ hr."

Every year on the Feast of St. Nicholas, the Patron Saint of Children, as well as of thieves and fishermen, one of the choir boys was elected the Boy Bishop, or Suffragan Bishop of New Romney, and his authority lasted from December 6th to Holy Innocents Day, December 28th. The election made, the boy was dressed in full episcopal robes, with mitre and crosier, and attended by his comrades dressed as priests, made a circuit of the town blessing the people. During the period of his office, he performed all ceremonies and functions of the church, except the Mass. This old custom was finally abolished by Queen Elizabeth.

It is not only our churches that have suffered from the ravages of time. Many, if not most, of our other ancient buildings have also disappeared. Our old Town Hall supported on its pillars with its market underneath, has been replaced by a modern structure. The site of our Market Cross is forgotten, and most of our old houses have been refronted, though in the "New Inn" and elsewhere traces of fifteenth century interiors can still be seen. The remains of the old Cobb Mansion, now our Workhouse, with its magnificent semi-circular sixteenth century walled garden, still give us glimpses of a social life that has long since vanished from our midst. Even as late as the seventeenth century, there must have been streets of houses to the north of the town where the grassy track that is now known as Rolfe's Lane winds through the meadows.

It must not be forgotten, however, that quite apart from our own civic records additional interest attaches to Romney from the fact that our Town has for centuries had the custody of the Cinque Port archives as well.

The old iron chest containing the Cinque Port records is still kept in our Town Hall. Constructed a hundred years ago, it is fitted with two locks, and one of the keys is held by

the Mayor of New Romney, and the other by the Solicitors of the Ports. In it are kept the White and Black books of the Cinque Ports, containing the minutes of the annual meetings from 1345 until the present day, though the Black Book as the second volume which begins in 1572 is called, has been recently removed to Rye for the convenience of the Ports' Solicitors.

Besides these volumes, among the other documents which have been preserved, perhaps the most interesting, are a series of forty-two diaries, written by the Cinque Port Bailiffs to the Annual Herring Fair at Yarmouth, and containing accounts of their visits there during the years 1588 to 1638.

Quite apart from their Cinque Port interest these diaries are full of quaint and curious matter, illustrative of life in Elizabethan days, and it is hoped before long to print a selection of the most interesting among them for the benefit of the modern student.

Until a few years ago there was also preserved at Romney the actual Cinque Port banner or flag which on these occasions was carried in front of our Bailiffs by the official Standard Bearer of the Ports.

This banner was made pursuant to a Cinque Port resolution in 1632, and when the contents of the chest were investigated a few years ago, it was found to be in a very dilapidated condition.

Romney was successful in drawing the attention of the Cinque Port authorities to its urgent need of repair. This was subsequently effected, but the restored Banner was shortly afterwards removed to Dover and hung in the Cinque Port Hall there, where it can now be seen.

Though very much has disappeared, and the receding sea has rendered our once famous harbour but a memory, I would like to impress upon the people of Romney that they still have left to them what is probably one of the finest collections of records in existence, and to urge upon them their duty to take steps to preserve for future generations this unique heritage, almost the last remaining relic of our former greatness and our glorious past.