

## CLOPTON AND THE CLOPTONS.

BY ARTHUR HODGSON.

IN reading this paper on Clopton and the Cloptons, I feel that I lay myself open to the charge of some presumption. I cannot aspire to be an archæologist ; my knowledge of the subject is of a very limited description. In Australia—where I have spent the best years of my life—we cannot boast of time-honoured monuments ; everything there has been built up within a century. I shall read this brief paper with the hope of eliciting, rather than of giving, information. Samuel Ireland, writing in 1795, says : “Of this venerable house, with the church of Stratford in the distance, I have annexed a faithful sketch. It presents an irregular front, built in the time of Henry VII ; the grand aspect has been modernised, and is in so indifferent a style as to be unworthy of notice.” This house, independent of its family associations, has, in fact, little interest ; it has no claim to fine architecture ; the north and west sides are said to have been built in Henry VII’s time ; and, happily, one morsel of the original house has been spared. It stands at the back, and was a porchway entrance across the ancient moat, and Shakespere and his friends must have passed scores of times under its portal. The moat ran directly in front of it, and was, some years back, disturbed, in order to lay some modern foundation. Various relics of by-gone days were on that occasion discovered ; among them three sack bottles, of stunted form, made of the coarsest glass, bearing the crest of John à Combe, which I purchased at the sale.

The south and east part was reconstructed by Sir Edward Walker, in the time of Charles II, probably about the year 1665. Walker died in this house in 1677. He, in 1649, went over to Holland and direct to Charles II, to convey to him the news of the painful tragedy of January 30th (the execution of his father). Some forty years ago, it was fast falling into decay, when it was resuscitated by the wealth of my predecessor, who added the drawing-room and orangery, altered and pulled down a large number of small rooms, and modernised, with questionable taste, much of the



original building. The attic story of this house was formerly used as a chapel, and on its walls, in Samuel Ireland's time, were several scriptural inscriptions in black letter, and paintings on religious subjects, some of which my venerable friend Mr. Fisher Tomes can well remember to have seen when he was a resident here in 1821. These paintings and inscriptions are now unfortunately effaced by white-washing and papering, but I have serious thoughts of pulling down the paper, and bringing these rude and quaint frescoes to light. In this attic a number of goods and chattels, the property of one Ambrose Rokewood, one of the Gunpowder Plot conspirators, who lived here at the time (1606), were seized and forfeited to the crown, an inventory of which is exhibited at the museum, Shakespere's birth-place. Pope Sixtus IV, A.D. 1474, granted to John Clopton and his heirs, leave to have divine service celebrated in a private chapel.

William Howitt gives a sketch of Clopton House from the pen of a lady who was at school at Stratford in 1820, and, writing about the chapel, she says—"I went in on my hands and knees, for the entrance was very low," and she goes on to say, "every here and there as I wandered, I came upon a fresh branch of a staircase, and so numerous were the crooked, half-lighted passages, that I wondered if I could find my way back again." This description would do for Compton Wynyates. On the floor in the room adjoining the chapel are some large blood stains, where a horrible murder is supposed to have been committed, and the legend is that the victim has "walked" ever since. My predecessor introduced gas all over the house and into the attic, which has had the desired effect, as I have been told that ghosts don't care about being lighted up. At the rear of the gardens is a succession of small fish-ponds, and beyond is a spring, in which Margaret Clopton is supposed to have drowned herself. It is now arched over nearly level with the ground, being only open at one end. This never failing spring supplies the house with water. On a stone laid at the back, but which was probably laid at its mouth, are inscribed the initials S. J. C., 1686, no doubt those of Sir John Clopton, who died in 1692, and who most probably first inclosed this well. This Sir John Clopton new-fronted Clopton House, and decorated the north bow-window of the dining-



room with the armorial bearings of his family, in stained glass, for *four* generations.

It may not be uninteresting to glance at the pedigree of the Clopton family, who took their surname from this manor, and resided here for upwards of five hundred years. Clopton was granted by Peter de Montfort to John de Clopton in the reign of Henry III. Dugdale gives the date as 1236. Passing rapidly over the members of the family we come to Walter Clopton, who in the time of Edward I assumed the surname of Cockfield from an Essex property; but his grandson, John, reassumed the name. He was the father of Hugh, a celebrated mercer, who, having made a very considerable fortune in London, became Lord Mayor of London in 1492. This knight may be said to have refounded the family, and was a special munificent benefactor to Stratford. He spanned the Avon with a substantial bridge; built Clopton House, where on more than one occasion he received King Henry VII; built New Place, where Shakespeare lived and died; bequeathed large sums of money for the support of many excellent charities; glazed the chancel of the parish church; raised a monument to the glory of God by the erection of the Guild Chapel close to his own house, known as New Place; and in the year 1496, in London, at the advanced age of seventy-eight (a bachelor), he meekly and honourably died.

We come next to Joyce Clopton, daughter of William Clopton, born in 1558; married, in 1580, to George Carew, created Earl of Totness, the very celebrated Master of the Ordnance. She died in 1636, and is buried with her husband in Clopton Chapel. There was no issue from this marriage.

One more of the name remains to be mentioned,—Sir Hugh Clopton, who committed a gross act of vandalism by the demolition, in 1700, of the house erected in 1490 by his ancestor Sir Hugh Clopton, and built on the same spot another house which the ruthless Gastrel razed to the ground.

The Clopton family had been decaying ever since the civil war. The last of them married Mr. Partheische. She died towards the end of the last century, and left the estate to Mr. Schrimsten, her nearest of kin, who took the name of Clopton. He died, without issue, in 1815. The estate then passed into the hands of others, who all (five in number)



died without issue, when it was purchased by Mr. Fisher Tomes, who sold it to Mr. George Lloyd. He left it to his nephew the late Mr. Charles Warde, from whose executors I purchased it at auction in 1873.

I was fortunate enough to secure at the sale several of the old pictures in the house of historical value, notably those of the Earl of Totness, Countess of Totness, Sir Edward Walker, Cromwell's mother, General Ireton, Shakespeare (painted by Wright in 1688), many portraits of the Clopton family, and last, though not least, "The Ghost Lady", or Charlotte Clopton, about whom there is so fearful a legend in Stratford Church. There is much uncertainty as to the authenticity of this portrait, and it is more probably the portrait of Lady Arabella Stuart, by Van Somer. She was the only child of the fifth Earl of Lennox, and was sacrificed to the jealousy of James I and the cruelty of his ministers, sinking from the effects of persecution into a state of helpless idiocy in the Tower, where she expired in September 1615. The portrait of the Earl of Totness, by Zuccherò, is undoubted, and is almost as fresh and in as fine preservation as on the day it was painted; and there is a strong likeness between the canvas and the marble, as you may have noticed this day in the Clopton pew. The Government, through my friend Mr. Graves of Pall Mall, have offered me a large sum for this portrait; but it is not my intention to part with it. In this house, where he lived and died, is its proper resting-place, and here it shall remain. There is another portrait extant of Lord Totness, at Gorbambury (Lord Verulam's), which is also in good preservation, and by Zuccherò; but it is the portrait of a much older man. The portrait of Lady Totness, on the staircase, also resembles the marble. I need scarcely remind my kind listeners that Lord Totness married the daughter and sole heir of William Clopton, by whom he acquired large estates. He was a son of a Dean of Exeter, and born in 1557. At one time he was commander-in-chief in Ireland, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and wrote *Hibernia Pacata*. Charles I raised him to the dignity of Earl of Totness and Baron of Clopton in 1625, the first year of his reign. The other portraits of the Clopton family hanging in the dining-room can be all authenticated, the history of some of them being endorsed on the canvas. During the life of my predecessor

they were locked up in a room in the attic, or back gallery, where they remained during my three years' tenancy, and when brought under the hammer by the auctioneer, I disputed the fact that they were Clopton portraits, but had to succumb to his superior knowledge. The portrait of the last of the Cloptons, Mrs. Partheische, and of her husband, painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds, have been transported from this house, subsequent to the sale of the estate, but previous to the sale of the pictures, against my will and without my knowledge, to a sister kingdom, where, I am credibly informed, they are now doing duty as ancestors of an illustrious Irish family. My efforts to regain possession of these two portraits have been, hitherto, unsuccessful. In drawing up this brief and imperfect sketch of Clopton and its former possessors, the thought very naturally occurred to me, what would be the feelings of the magnificent old Sir Hugh Clopton if he could be permitted to watch this day's proceedings, and listen to a stranger addressing this learned assemblage on the site of his ancestral hall? Yes, listen to one who had no Clopton blood running in his veins, no Clopton proclivities, no Clopton associations; but who had been successful in life, and by his own exertions put together a fortune in a distant English colony, one which during the good Sir Hugh's lifetime was undiscovered and unknown.

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