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The
BULLETIN
of the
EAST GRINSTEAD
SOCIETY

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THE EAST GRINSTEAD SOCIETY

The Society was founded in 1968 to protect and improve the amenities of East Grinstead and its environs. The town has a long history and a unique architectural heritage, entrusted for the time being to the hands of our generation. It should be our concern that such contributions as we in turn make are worthy of the past and a fitting bequest to the future.

The Society arranges regular talks, discussions and visits. It produces a bi-annual Bulletin of articles of local interest and a quarterly Newsletter. In 1969 it produced a report on the High Street conservation area which was well received as a basis for future policy. It is very active in monitoring all planning applications and making representations to the authorities on planning matters. It has held six exhibitions, published a book of reminiscences, two town trails and three sets of postcards reproducing old photographs of the town, restored the churchyard railings, planted trees, presented a seat to Sackville College and, with the Town Council, established a Town Museum (now independent).

The Society is registered as a charity (no. 257870) and with the Civic Trust, affiliated to the Sussex Archaeological Society and a member of the Sussex Federation of Amenity Societies. A copy of its constitution is available on request from the Vice-Chairman.

The strength of such a Society lies in the extent to which it can be seen to represent public opinion; the larger its membership the greater its influence. The subscription is £4 p.a. (additional members in the same household £3, persons in full-time education 25 new pence) to be renewed on 1 January every year, except by those joining on or after 1 October.

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EDITORIAL

We regret that the long-promised article on Cromwell House is still not ready and has had to be postponed indefinitely but in compensation we have five highly topical pages on Dorset House instead, as well as familiar features. We hope we are still improving our standards, aided now by the Editor's new electronic typewriter!

COVER PICTURE

Cromwell, Sackville, Amherst and Dorset Houses in our High Street, postcard 150 of Harold Connold (fl. 1926-59), reproduced by kind permission of his successor Mr Malcolm Powell. See the articles on Dorset House on pp.5-9 below, with views of the rear during this winter's restoration, taken by our member Mr Miller.

ADDENDA AND CORRIGENDA

References to earlier Bulletins are given in the form adopted for the index in Bulletin 40: the first two figures for the Bulletin number, the second two for the page number.

FOREST ROW GUIDEBOOKS (1509,1916)

It has been known for some time that a guide to Forest Row was published in 1906, written by Miss C.E.Molloy and printed by Maplesden of East Grinstead, but until this year no copies had been traced. Now Mr E.C.Byford has located (in private hands) not only that June 1906 version but also a fuller, rewritten one, illustrated with photographs and dated February 1907, also printed by Maplesden. He is generously making typewritten transcriptions of both for the Town Museum.

EAST GRINSTEAD GUIDEBOOKS (1307f.,2310,3104,4104):

To the lists already published should be added

27 1988 M.J.Leppard, East Grinstead, 4th ed.
(F6/8170/01/EG/AS)

COVER: colour picture of east end of Middle Row by
R.A.Michell

EAST GRINSTEAD DIRECTORIES (1112,4314)

The Town Museum has recently acquired

1914 Dixon's East Grinstead, Ashurst Wood, Forest Row and Haywards Heath Family Almanack and Directory for 1914
(circulation 10,000)

[This issue, previously unrecorded, is the first to include Haywards Heath, in consequence of opening a branch there.]

LIMEKILNS IN EAST GRINSTEAD (2808,4411): Mr & Mrs B.Chibnall report that a limekiln is listed in a valuation of Hollybush Farm by William Turner in 1840 (West Sussex Record Office Add. MS 33835).

In Newsletter 41 (April 1988) we noted the acquisition by the West Sussex Record Office of a bound collection of correspondence and other papers of William Hall of East Grinstead, an excise officer in Sussex, Kent and Leicestershire, 1811-40.

Having now seen these documents (Add MSS 39,854-39,858), I can confirm their importance and interest, particularly in taking us back before the diaries of Thomas Cramp and reminiscences of Edward Steer for comparable glimpses of everyday life here in the previous generation.

William Hall (1789-1840) was the youngest of seven children of Russell and Mary Hall of East Grinstead. The later letters are from his eldest brother Russell and mainly concerned with family affairs, the earlier ones from John Hoath who died in 1835 aged 87. With memories stretching back to the mid-18th century Hoath is the first in a line of local patriots ('O rare old Grinstead!' he often exclaims) that reaches to the founders and sustainers of our Society.

News and gossip both add to and flesh out our existing knowledge of the period. I was able, for example, to use Hoath's information several times in my talk at our December meeting, 'Around the Year in Old East Grinstead'. The main impression, not surprisingly, is of continuity; for example the penchant for striking and original nicknames was already well established. Surprises, however, were the information that the well for the town pump at the end of Middle Row was not dug until 1813 and that the town was 'now lited up with Lamps' in 1835. Most unexpectedly, there is no hint of the decline in the town's fortunes in this period which those of us who have pronounced on such matters thought we had found evidence for. Some reconsideration may be called for on our part.

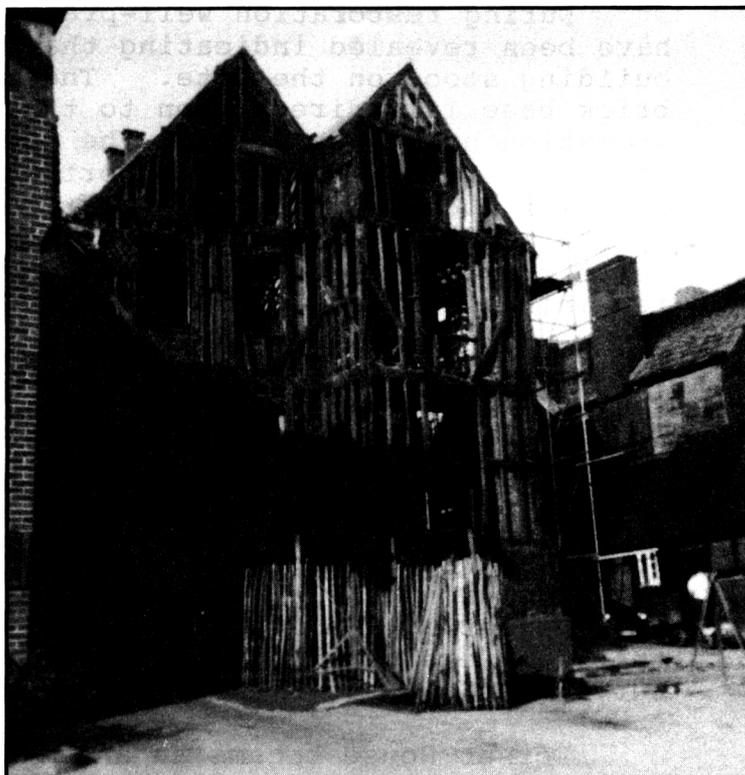
Whose Bulletin are you reading? Our Bulletins are read by far more people than the two hundred members of the East Grinstead Society, in libraries, by borrowing or by casual purchase. Why not be sure of seeing each number as it comes out and at the same time help us financially to keep it going by taking out a subscription to the Society, only £4 p.a.? Send it to the Hon. Treasurer, 2 Benchfield Close, East Grinstead. Thank you.

LOCAL REFERENCES IN SUSSEX ARCHAEOLOGICAL COLLECTIONS (continued)

- vol.74 (1933) p.246 Obituary of W.H.Hills; his manuscripts
p.247 Restoration of Homestall
- vol.75 (1934) --
- vol.76 (1935) --
- vol.77 (1936) p.lxiv Pamphlet on Ashdown Forest by S.J.Marsh
pp.26-59 London-Portslade Roman road by Felbridge

DORSET HOUSE, 62-64 HIGH ST

The extensive reconstruction of Dorset House (pictured cover and right) gave Mr Hartland our planning officer and Mrs Yarwood our Chairman the opportunity to inspect the house and work last November in company with the architect in charge, Mr Timothy Hill, F.R.I.B.A. Each has written up for us what they saw and heard, from the point of view of a professional architect and an architectural historian respectively. Mr R.E.S. Miller has contributed photographs and the Editor documentary information. In recording and assessing what has not been accessible for nearly 300 years, and probably will not be accessible again for another 300, these accounts are an important contribution to our knowledge, even though not the report of a full technical survey.



STRUCTURAL

C. E. Hartland

Dorset House is an elegant Queen Anne building on the south side of the High Street, listed grade II and in the conservation area, where it is surrounded by buildings dating from the 14th to the 18th century. As it is today the whole building reflects the not inconsiderable affluence of those who were responsible for its rebuilding in such a substantial manner.

It is flanked on either side by oversailing first floors, of the Dorset Arms on the west and by an older timbered residence, Amherst House, on the east, providing a continuous linked facade on the upper floors facing the High Street. At ground level the openings thus created provided access over the pavement to the rear where formerly 'portlands' (gardens) existed. These are, unfortunately, now paved and provide only car parking for both the Dorset Arms and Dorset House.

The external side and rear walls were tile-clad. The main facade facing the High Street is built in red brick in Flemish bond. The rubbed brick arches to the windows and the brick string courses all indicate a high standard of workmanship. The windows are double hung sashes and glazing bars all in cased frames with timber shutters inside. The principal entrance is covered by an 18th century pedimented hood with cut brackets. A strong eaves cornice studded with dentils with bed mould supports the tiled roof into which dormer windows were inserted in the 19th century. There is one monogrammed rainwater head giving a date of 1705. The brick front is consistent with this date.

During restoration well-preserved foundations and timbers have been revealed indicating that previously a wholly oak-framed building stood on the site. The timber framing rested on a brick base laid directly on to the sandstone bedrock floor. Restoration has revealed both the good condition of that frame and the generous size of the supporting floor timbers. The evidence suggests, however, that this earlier building was only some three quarters of the width of the existing structure, though the full depth from front to back, with access to the rear occupying the remaining, eastern, quarter.

A shallow basement existed under the full extent of the present building. The fall of the site from front to rear enabled it to be at ground level to the garden.

The street door, raised a few steps above pavement level, opened directly into a large ante-room. Access to the main staircase was gained from this apartment. The front rooms on either side were elegantly proportioned, with a ceiling height of eleven feet. They were panelled throughout and the two rooms at the rear were panelled with material re-used from an earlier century.

Dorset House became an annexe of the Dorset Arms hotel in c. 1920 with access through the party walls. Some 15 years ago, when residential accommodation was replaced by extended dining, bar and service facilities, extensive internal alterations were carried out to both buildings. It was probably at this time that a purely utilitarian staircase was substituted for the original finely carved oak one reported by R.T.Mason in 1939 [1], installed when the building was reconstructed into the fine town house we see today.

Dorset House was empty and in deteriorating condition when the present owners (Grand Metropolitan Estates Ltd) acquired it. They entered into protracted consultation and negotiation with the local authority's officers with a view to its restoration. Conversion into offices was a commercial expedient reluctantly agreed upon as the only way of meeting the very considerable costs of restoration.

It was finally agreed that a limited extension at the rear should be permitted on all floors. The architects have provided here a pastiche of the existing side and rear elevations, tile-hanging the whole to conceal the junction. Existing tiles have been re-used wherever possible. Frames and windows from the rear of the building have been re-used after restoration in the new rear walls. The extended building now provides 5,700 square feet of lettable floor space.

The lower ground floor (basement) has been lowered below the bottom of the original foundations to provide better headroom. The old building now stands on all four walls on a re-inforced concrete 'collar'.

Among the conditions of planning approval the owners have undertaken to be meticulous about retaining the internal features. This work is indeed being carried out particularly well and damaged parts stitched together ^{or} renewed as necessary in order to retain the character of the building.

The grand proportions of the ground floor reception rooms have been emphasised by the re-use of the apparently 18th century painted panelling found in situ. The Elizabethan panelling in the back rooms has been similarly retained. All are being topped by moulded timber coverings re-using the old materials wherever possible. The original shutters to the windows to the streets are being restored and rehung. Few fireplaces have been considered worthy of retention except one on the ground floor.

A new but traditionally designed main staircase has been constructed more in keeping with the building and inserted into the original stair well. This has involved unblocking a curved-headed leaded glass window of indeterminate age in the east wall which lit the landing and will, when repaired, do so again. Extensive artificial lighting is now installed.

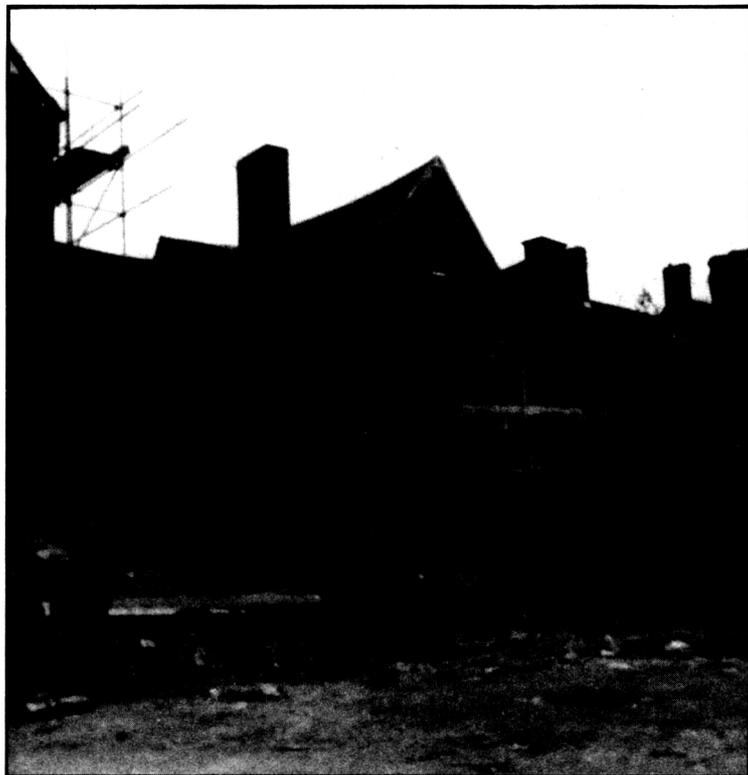
Every effort is being made to use traditional forms of construction during the restoration with seasoned oak posts and fitch beams [compound layered beams] being incorporated on structural supports instead of steel sections. New double hung sash windows where needed have been carefully copied from the 18th century originals.

Planning conditions also required that the ancient forge (illustrated above), within the site but separate from the main building, must be restored. This has been done.

However sympathetically the work is carried out, the need for the change of use to offices and the unwelcome extension have materially altered the structure, as has the need to strengthen floors to carry heavier loads and to raise fire protection by thicker and heavier internal doors.

Dorset House is now restored after past neglect. This has been made possible only by the sturdy nature of its basic timber structure thanks to robust construction by its original builder craftsmen and to the meticulous care and skill of the architects and tradesmen today.

From the High Street Dorset House will remain one of the architectural gems of East Grinstead and even much of its interior will retain an air of historic authenticity.



[1] Sussex Archaeological Collections, vol.80, p.19

A PERSONAL VIEW**Doreen Yarwood**

It was of particular interest, in November 1988, to be able to study the timber box-frame construction of the earlier building which had been exposed when the later brick cladding had been removed to prepare for the construction of an extension at the rear of the property. Inside, surviving wood panelling in the lower rooms and the hall fireplace were also visible. Apart from this, much of the interior was not readily accessible owing to the extensive work being carried out, though the architect was most helpful in explaining the project to be completed.

It was with great pleasure that I took the opportunity in late February 1989 to be conducted round the entire building and have the many notable points explained to me. Mr Hartland's account makes them very clear; I would just like to add some of my own, less well-informed, reactions.

Because this building is listed and is in the most important conservation area of East Grinstead it has been incumbent upon Grand Metropolitan Estates Ltd to restore and retain as much of the original work as possible. That goes without saying. However, I cannot stress too strongly my admiration for the way in which they have approached this problem and carried it out. Immense care has been taken to preserve every fragment of original panelling, timbers, floor boards, glass, brickwork and tiles, and where insufficient material survives to complete this work new has been created to match precisely the older work. This project has been imaginatively carried out to a very high standard.

Examples of this achievement may be seen in the retention of the old hall fireplace, the reconstruction of the classical timber arch in the hall passage, using much of the original material earlier re-used elsewhere, the repainting with original material of the painted pine panels in the larger rooms and retention of the older square oak panels in others. In the new extension at the rear, which rises to the full height of the house, new panelling to dado rail level has been made to match older work and correctly moulded glazing bars to sash windows. Here wallpaper will cover the wall area down to dado level.

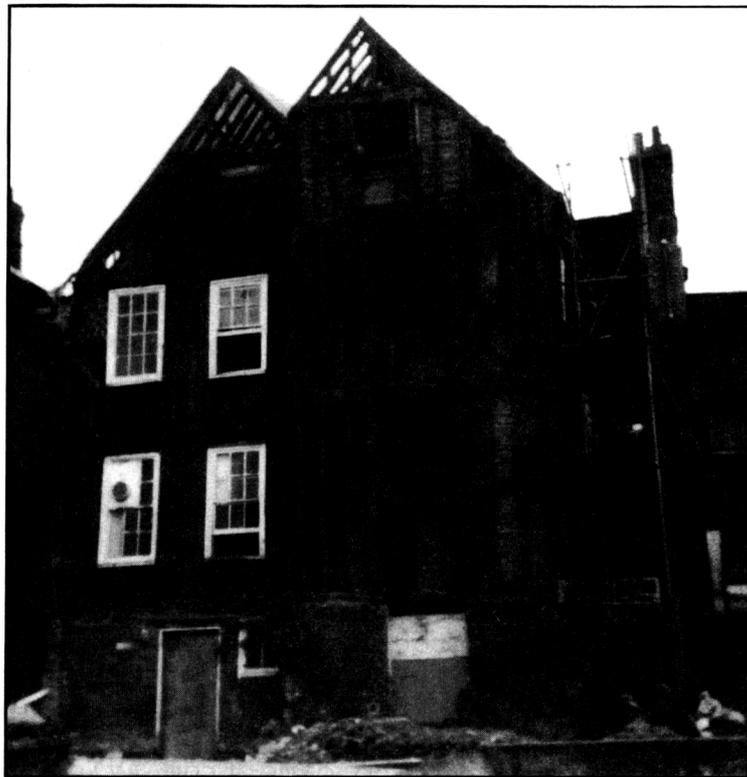
Probably of greatest interest in the interior is the top floor where much of the original timber structure in the attics of the house survives. Rafters, studs and plates of very old and hard oak are in situ, mainly adze cut though in a few instances sawn. In some parts of the roof, beams have been introduced which had been originally employed elsewhere - from another building or a ship, maybe? The headroom on this upper floor is limited; perhaps the shorter members of staff will occupy this accommodation? The natural lighting was inadequate so the architect has introduced unobtrusive skylights to remedy this. Necessarily modern fire doors have been given the appearance of tongue-and-grooving as well as iron hinges and door furniture.

To conclude, mention should be made of the carefully preserved and cleaned leaded glass staircase panel and the new upper staircase with turned balusters made from hemlock spruce wood.

DOCUMENTARY**M. J. Leppard**

(Based on deeds, rentals, parish registers, rate books and a variety of other original records too numerous to specify without overloading what are only interim notes. Thanks are due to Mr P.D. Wood for generously supplying a good deal of this material.)

We are fortunate that Thomas and Katherine James put their initials as well as the date (1705) on a rainwater head when they had Dorset House rebuilt; such precise information is available for few of our old houses.



Thomas James, gentleman, had acquired the house by 1695 and undoubtedly wanted to build a town house to complement his country house at Cowden. He died in 1730 and his widow in 1750. By 1734 their son Thomas, a clergyman baptised at Cowden in 1698, seems to have been living here. In 1746 he became Vicar of East Grinstead and in 1750 he granted leases on the house. When he died in 1757 his family's connection with the town seems to have ended.

In 1770 the house was acquired by the Sackvilles, along with a number of other burgage properties in the town, for the sake of the parliamentary votes they carried. By 1790 it was the home of Thomas Wakeham (formerly of the Hermitage), by 1811 of Maurice Halford Barrow and by 1811 (until at least 1861) of Thomas Robert Burt, three attorneys in succession in whose clients so grand a building must have inspired suitable confidence. In 1811 the annual rent was £30; in 1825 the house was valued at £25. Conversion from a private house to an annexe of the Dorset Arms seems to have taken place between 1914 and 1923.

The name Dorset House seems a very recent one, possibly conferred by the hotel on the takeover. No earlier name has been traced as yet.

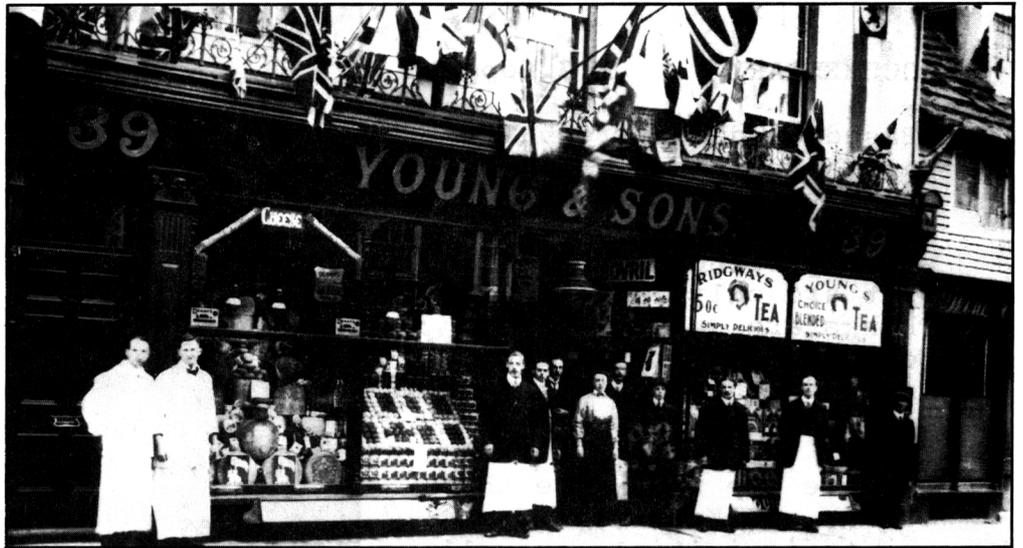
Little is known of earlier owners and occupiers that throws any light on the use of the pre-1705 building beyond its obvious residential one. Robert Mathew, there in c.1683, was a shoemaker. Richard Cole, recorded c.1645 to 1669, was assessed for three hearths in the 1670 hearth tax. In 1564 Andrew Cole (presumably an ancestor) was the owner and Thomas Wright the tenant. A Thomas Wright was a shoemaker in the town in 1588 but we do not know what the Coles did for a living.

The forge detected in an outbuilding can be associated with William Austen a blacksmith who held the west half of Amherst House in c.1683, for it is on the portland of that building and so not strictly relevant to the Dorset House story.

**EAST GRINSTEAD
THROUGH THE EYES
OF A REPORTER
(6)**

B. Desmond

[RIGHT: Young's grocery shop before Mr Desmond came here, as decorated for 1911 coronation (from our post-card series, 12 n.p. at Museum)]



I remember Arthur Hemsley, manager of Young & Sons (later Coatmans), grocers in the High Street, and Mr E.W. Young, owner of nearby Young & Sons, the drapers, who gave me a somewhat hectic time when he wrote a small book about the town which included an imaginary character 'Old George'*. The firm was bought up by Mr Arthur Perry, who came from Aylesbury. He was a tower of strength, if that is the right term, of Moat Congregational Church and was elected a member of the Urban District Council. To him must go the credit of introducing the Chairman's chain of office. After his passing his wife went to Eastbourne and for a time we communicated as her husband was also a keen Rotarian.

Another well-known local personality of those days was Freddy Gear who lived in West Street and worked for Brooker Bros, next to Tooths with a covered passageway between them. Freddy had worked on a great many buildings in the town and one of his most memorable was the parish church tower. I went up with him on one occasion to see the stunning view of the whole town spread out beneath. One morning Freddy called at the office and invited me to have a celebration drink with him across at the newly established bar attached to the Whitehall or Grosvenor Rooms. 'Been with the firm 50 years' he said, and then rather sadly, 'They seem to have forgotten'.

Some readers may recall the first time 'Down Your Way' was broadcast from East Grinstead. Prior to it a B.B.C. representative called and asked if I could put them in touch with likely people for them to choose from, apart from the obvious Sackville College. I mentioned one of the Stenning family of the timber yard and Freddy Gear. Both broadcast and chose their piece of

I should mention the somewhat odd set-up next to our offices in London Road which later became Martells. This was a kind of open vegetable market run by a group of ladies who wore, to me, somewhat strange gowns. They could have belonged to some sort of sect or society but I never found out as all was taken so much for granted. There was a vegetarian society in East Grinstead in those days and I reported their meetings which regularly took place in the Queens Hall.

* The Pageant of East Grinstead High Street and Reminiscences of Old George (1936)

THE NEW CHURCH GUIDE

The newly issued illustrated guide to St Swithun's Church is of modest size (seven pages of text and photographs) but covers a lot of ground. A brief historical note is followed by a helpful discussion on the design and construction; a leisurely walk round the interior and a quick canter round the outside provide essential information on what to see and who made it. Michael Leppard and Doreen Yarwood have supplied a highly condensed but lucid text, and the booklet is illustrated by a ground plan and six exceptionally distinguished colour photographs by local photographer David Gadsby.

It is very welcome; for the first time we have a balanced account, brief though it is, of the history, architecture and internal accoutrements, and we need it; our church, though not old as churches go, is in several ways unusual, and to appreciate it without help is not easy. Congratulations to all concerned.

[50 n.p. at the Church or Town Museum, by post 65 n.p. from A.F. Challis, c/o The vicarage, Church Lane, East Grinstead]

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS AT GULLEGE

The East Grinstead Museum Society has just produced its first Occasional Paper, written and researched by Dudley Skinner.

It concerns the fascinating area round Gullege which must have a high priority for any historian or archaeologist. With a Roman road, neolithic flints, Dark Age bloomeries, a moated site, a deserted village, a probable Domesday connection and a beautiful old house, the study of its history has been undeservedly neglected.

Mr Skinner has made a promising start with the collection and plotting of surface finds, mainly pottery of the 13th to 17th centuries, some flints and metalware. The sites of three possible mediaeval buildings have been identified. It is to be hoped that much more work will be done in this area and we look forward to more occasional papers in the future.

It must, however, be said that the presentation leaves something to be desired. The East Grinstead Museum Society is a responsible body and should not be satisfied with a paper illustrated by 'a rough sketch', plans and sketches with no scales or north points, and a statement, bare of references, that 'a little research revealed that ...'. Good fieldwork has been done and is worthy of better publishing, but apart from this we must all welcome unreservedly this first of a series. May it be a long one!

[50 n.p. at the Museum, by post 65]

CONTINUED OVER

THE MUSEUM GUIDE

Occasional Paper no.2 issued by the East Grinstead Museum Society is a brief guide to the Museum itself. The principal exhibits in the main room ('The Story of our Town') and the Crafts room are described and, within the limitations of space, some notes on the background are given. Other museum services such as the temporary exhibitions, publications, study evenings and the Museum Society itself are appended and the whole is illustrated by line drawings of various periods. A useful publication which every visitor should take away as an aid to recollection.

[50 n.p. at the Museum (by post 65) but free to anyone taking out Museum Society membership or renewing it in 1989 (£1 p.a.; half-price to holders of Museums Year passports)]

SHORTER NOTICES

by the Editor

THE WISDOM OF JOHN MASON NEALE FROM HIS SERMONS selected by A.G. Lough (1989) consists of extracts arranged to cover the church year. Nearly all were delivered in East Grinstead, at either St Margaret's Convent or Sackville College. If Neale's mystical interpretation of scripture no longer commends itself, the beauty and directness of the language and the incidental local references can still appeal. [52 A5 pages, including foreword; £3.50 from Dr Lough, Hennock Vicarage, Newton Abbot, Devon]

FOREST ROW, vol.4, part 1 (Nov. 1988) completes the reminiscences of Richard Caldwell, 1900-25, contains a long, illustrated article on the Second World War in Forest Row and reprints the East Grinstead Observer's account of the village's 1887 golden jubilee celebrations. [£1 at Museum, by post £1.15]

LOCAL HISTORY NOTES

ADVOWSON: Without any mention in the press (not even the parish magazine) in September 1988 the Sackville family ceded to the Bishop of Chichester by deed of gift the advowson of East Grinstead parish church, i.e. the right of appointing its vicar. Around 1100 our church was given by Alvred the Butler (Pincerna) to Lewes Priory, and the Priors appointed its incumbents until the dissolution of the monasteries (1539), after which Anne of Cleves had the right until her death in 1557 when the Sackvilles acquired it. Now the patronage of Sackville College must be the only remaining link between East Grinstead and the family that was so closely involved in its history for so long. But such a move is in accordance with the centralising and standardising tendencies that characterise the Church of England today. **M.J.L.**

QUERIES: Mr K.C.Leslie, West Sussex Record Office, Chichester, appeals for information on a 'crammer' named Townsend in c.1919 in East Grinstead who specialised in getting boys into Eton and taught Edward James, the eccentric patron of the arts, subsequently going bankrupt. Mr J.A.Hounscome, 199 Estcots Drive, East Grinstead, is researching the history of the town's cinemas and would welcome any information.