

THOMAS HERON OF CHILHAM.

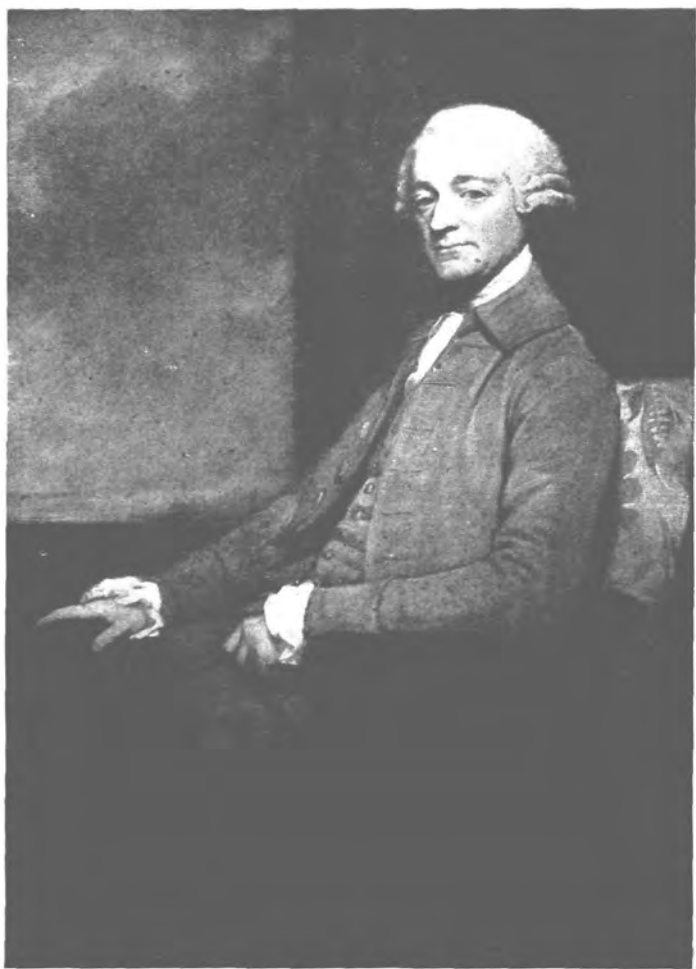
BY R. F. JESSUP, F.S.A.

THOMAS HERON, Lord of the Manor of Chilham between 1774 and 1794, came from a family well-established in Newark-on-Trent and anciently in Northumberland. Like his elder brother John and his father Robert he followed a legal career. He was admitted to Lincoln's Inn in 1754, in which year he was also appointed Recorder of Newark in succession to his elder brother and his father, both of whom had died in 1753, and was called to the Bar five years later. When he bought the Chilham estate he was 51 years old, and had presumably retired from an active practice in law, for we read nothing of his legal duties in the many bundles of letters and papers which he left behind him. His first wife had died some years previously, but after five years at Chilham he married Catharine Sawbridge, daughter of a neighbour, Jacob Sawbridge of Olantigh, the wedding taking place by special licence at Godmersham Park in the Long Room which later was to become so familiar to Jane Austen.

During his stay in Kent, Thomas Heron took but little part in the concerns of the county at large, spending most of his time quietly at Chilham, where he seems to have undertaken his obligations as Squire readily enough in a modest way. Of his outside activities there is little known. An occasional Breakfast or Assembly at Canterbury, the Annual Races on Barham Downs, and a season's bathing at Weymouth seem to have made up his social round. It was perhaps natural that the affairs of his adopted county should claim so small a part of his time: his supreme and persistent interest was in his Castle and estate, its finance, its possibilities of development along prudent lines, above all its history, and especially that part of it concerned in written record.

Of all this and a great deal more we learn from Heron's private papers, many of which after his death at Chilham in 1794 were removed to the family home at Stubton Hall, Newark, where they remained almost unnoticed until the present owner of Stubton, Colonel Sir Edmund Royds, published certain of them in a bibliographical account of the Heron and Crayle families.¹ Sir Edmund Royds very kindly gave me exceptional facilities for consulting the documents in his possession, and further he has presented certain of the items of local interest to the Beane Institute at Canterbury. Plans of Heron's alterations and improvements to the Jacobean house at Chilham are

¹ Edmund Royds, "Stubton Strong-room Stray Notes," *The Architectural and Archaeological Soc. Lincoln, 1926 Report* (Lincoln, 1928).



THOMAS HERON.

still in existence, and there is also a large-scale plan of the estate which he had made in 1778.

The culmination of Heron's painstaking research into the history of the Barony and Manor of Chilham was *The Antiquities of Chilham*, a well-written and documented manuscript of some length executed in 1791 by Christopher Greaves, the Steward of the Manor. It included, among other matters, genealogical accounts of the chief owners of Chilham, the early descent of the property and its connection with the castle-guard of Dover Castle, full descriptions of the dependent manors with their descents, and much topographical detail. Most of this carefully sought and recorded information was passed on to Edward Hasted who used it directly in the detail of his account of Chilham. As a piece of historical research this manuscript could fairly claim a place in the contemporary minor literature of Kent exemplified by Boys and Somner.

The original volume, a small folio bound in red morocco, is in the hands of Mr. Arthur T. Bolton, himself the author of a privately printed *Memoir of Chilham*. A copy was made for Sir Edmund Davis, and remains with the Estate, and Sir Edmund kindly had a photostatic copy made for my use, which copy I was able to collate with the original with the ready acquiescence of Mr. Bolton.

In 1786, Edward King, the well-known antiquary, called at Chilham to inspect the Keep of the old Castle, an account of which he hoped to include in a forthcoming book of observations on ancient castles.¹ A lengthy correspondence followed, Heron furnishing a plan on which he had indicated the site and nature of some recent discoveries made on levelling the ground in the north-west quarter of the Bailey. There were wall-footings of chalk and flint laid in mortar, and worked with a facing, the outer side of the wall being battered and the inner perpendicular. There were also blocks of tooled chalk, and an arched structure which from the illustration looks very much like a Roman hypocaust. In a small pit under the wall was a globular pedestal urn which is depicted in a minute drawing. The relics were in due course inspected by "the gentlemen of the neighbourhood most conversant with antiquities, who were unable to decide upon their nature," and after an interval they disintegrated in the severe winter weather. This same walling was uncovered in later years, once during Mr. Edward Hardy's ownership and again by Sir Edmund Davis. There is every reason to believe that it is part of the twelfth century castle enceinte, and not of Roman date in spite of its superficial likeness to a hypocaust. Hasted's account of the Romans at Chilham, derived from Heron and from this discovery in particular, cannot be regarded as more than a generalization.

Among the papers preserved in the Strong Room at Stubton Hall is

¹ Edward King, *Munimenta Antiqua* (1804), iii, 154-66 and Plates xxi-xxiv.

a series of letters which were written between Thomas Heron and his younger brother, Sir Richard, over a broken period of years from 1778 to 1781. Thomas Heron purchased Stubton Hall in 1787; thirteen years after he acquired the Chilham estate from the Colebrooke Trustees. Most of the letters came from Stubton on the occasions of his frequent visits to relations there.

Richard Heron, to whom most of the letters are addressed, was Chief Secretary to the Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland as well as a Privy Councillor, and was created a Baronet in 1778, presumably for his political services. He was but two years younger than his brother Thomas, and between the two there existed a very deep love and affection. Their letters and drafts, of which there are over one hundred, provide interesting commentaries on a wide variety of subjects, both foreign and domestic. Most of them contain a good deal of family matters of little interest, and it has therefore seemed better to edit the letters freely rather than to print them in detail.

In many letters, Sir Richard refers to the growing commercial and constitutional difficulties in Ireland which were to lead ultimately to the repeal of Poyning's Act and the establishment of an independent Irish Parliament. From Dublin Castle he writes in May 1778 that "all Ranks are wonderfully agitated and if we lose the Bill allowing an Export of our Products and Manfrs the most serious consequences are to be apprehended." And again a month later he tells of his active support for the Bill designed to repeal the Popery Laws so far as they affected real estate. "It is," he says, "a very delicate Question in this Kingdom, and will produce a most interesting Day . . . the Government wishes well to the principle of the Bill, and I shall support it. I believe it will be carried but not without Difficulty." It is now a matter of history that the Bill was passed eventually, and many long overdue concessions were thereby granted to the oppressed Roman Catholic landlords. Sir Richard himself played a great part in securing its passage, though, as he tells his brother in a long letter written at the end of the Session, he was quite "inexperienced in Palt and the trim of it," and was obliged to work without the assistance of the Attorney-General, and with only an inferior Under-Secretary and "clerks who had never been accustomed to more than the Business of clerks." An interesting sidelight on French intervention in the American War, which was then approaching its height, is given by one of his letters written on Christmas Eve, 1778, saying that owing to pressure of business the Richard Herons would be unable to arrive at Chilham in time for Christmas dinner: "We shall be happy to hear Monsr D'Estaire¹ is arrived in France as there is reason to fear he may do Mischief

¹ The reference seems to be to Admiral d'Estaing under whose command a French fleet was ordered to the West Indies with the object of breaking the English line of communication with America.

in the West Indian Islands and even overtake our ships which are detached with Troops from Clinton's Army to the West Indies." By 1779, the Irish situation was a little easier. Sir Richard writes that the Session opened very unpleasantly. "The Distress and Expectations of the Country urge them to Seek for an Extension of Commerce in very firm Terms but I think we are beginning to compose." But, he adds, if the British Parliament does not immediately do something to conciliate Irish opinion by a material extension of its commerce, the consequences will be very serious. Thomas Heron followed his brother's career in Irish politics with anxiety. He had no direct interest in Ireland, and was therefore able to view its problems without personal bias. In his own opinion, he modestly tells Sir Richard (and the subsequent writings of historians have proved the validity of his contentions) *much of the Irish distress was due to "the advance of rents which are very much remitted to England, and the Country by this Means drained of its cash. I am no friend to monopolies and exclusions in trade. . . . I heartily wish everything may be settled."* Three years later, after the abolition of the unfair trade restrictions maintained by England, a settlement was made, and an independent Irish Parliament at last established.

Thomas Heron's interest in political questions seems on the whole to have been academic rather than practical, though he was careful to keep himself well informed about local conditions which might affect his property or employees at Chilham. His political sense was usually sound, though inevitably tinged with his own interests. In April 1778, he tells Sir Richard that he had been asked if he had a mind to come into Parliament; to which approach his considered reply was "that if there was an opening where I could come in on easy terms, I had no objection."

There was in 1778 a proposal to raise by subscription in Kent a regiment for service in the American War. This project Thomas Heron refused to support, but he readily in the same year subscribed twenty guineas towards the cost of raising an additional company of volunteers for the East Kent Militia. It was at that time feared that the spirit behind the Gordon riots might spread, and in addition there was much unrest here as elsewhere over the difficult question of economic and Parliamentary reform. Many counties called meetings to present petitions for reform to Parliament. In Kent, Thomas tells his brother, the Sheriffs refused to assemble the county for this purpose, but a meeting was held at Maidstone in March 1780, to which Thomas went at the urgent request of the Earl of Dorset, high with indignation, to support the cause of the landed gentry.

"The Meeting was numerous and respectable, and the parties seemed to be abt equal as to persons of Rank and Property. The Patriots had brought many inferior people to shout and show hands."

A Petition less drastic in its terms was proposed by Sir Thomas Mann, a prominent landowner from the Weald of Kent, and as no agreement between the parties was forthcoming, the Meeting was dissolved, both Petitions apparently being sent to Parliament.

Almost week by week, Thomas acquainted Richard with the progress of electioneering in Canterbury for the 1780 Parliament. "The Patriots represent the late Riots as very trifling and as nothing for people to be alarmed at. Such conversation gives no respectable opinion of those who hold such doctrine." Both the Herons' sympathies were naturally with the Tory party, but Thomas had already seen that owing to dilatory canvassing, the election at Canterbury was likely to go in favour of the Patriots, as did in fact happen.

Sir Richard Heron took a very great interest in his brother's estate at Chilham, in the development of which his advice was constantly asked. Thomas indeed took few steps to improve the property without his brother's approval, and even advised him of such small purchases as two cottages called Hempspots at Mountain Street, and a house and nine acres of land at Soles Hill, for the latter of which he paid £120 in 1780. Apart from the Park, certain river-meads, and woodland, all the estate was let to tenants, and Heron did no farming on his own account.

There are many letters relating to alterations of the Castle grounds. The house had already been rescued from its barn-like condition and put into good repair in 1774 and the year following, and much-needed repairs to the Castle Keep were not effected until 1786, both falling outside the period covered by the present correspondence. The new garden plans were made by Lancelot ("Capability") Brown, who is often regarded as the father of the English style in landscape gardening. His chief recommendations were these: "The spot where the Tith-barn is, tho' a little more distant, is out of the way and (is) suitable (for the kitchen-garden). One wall to be the boundary instead of the pales next to Danestreet road, the Garden to be oblong having its sides to that road and the Castle in order to open it as much as possible to the Sun. The Stables will be at the side of the old road and fronting the Castle wh will lay them more open to the Sun. . . . All the gardens below the House destroyed and made a pasture open to the Paddock or otherwise used as most agreeable and left at liberty for an approach. The Wall of the Upper Terras to be taken down & the Ground from the House sloped to the Wall of the next Terras to correspond with the slope before the House; the next Terras to remain Entire and the Wall wh divides it from the Bowling Green to be the fence or the boundary, and from the End of that Wall next to the Park the sunk fence and Wall to be continued to the clump on the Mound near the Castle." In particular, the house was to have no wall to spoil the view over the river valley, and in accordance with Brown's tradition, the

utmost use was to be made of existing undulations and natural features in the ground. Thus the top part of the rigid Italian garden shown in Buck's print was removed, and its place occupied with Bacon's chief delight, "green grass kept finely shorn." There was little direction to be given, Brown said, as regards openings to the Park: merely that fancy should be followed. The ground about the house should be levelled, and it was this levelling which obliterated the bailey of the early Castle, which we know from a Rental of 1538 to have consisted of a middle and further portion.

In his garden alterations, Thomas Heron spent so much money that he was obliged to ask his brother for a temporary loan of £500. "The woods," he says when speaking of the estate revenue, "also produced nothing last Winter, and I must raise supplies (of money) or remain indebted to Tradesmen wh will not be agreeable to me." A year or two later he inherited an annual income of some £3,000 from the residuary estate of his cousin, and he then settled Brown's bill for planning the alterations for a hundred and fifteen guineas. "As I am grown rich," he writes to Sir Richard, "he (Brown) thought it right to touch me a little." The bill was in fact moderate, for Brown had produced several plans and incorporated many additional details as Heron from time to time changed his mind. It seems that Brown finally became a little tired of Chilham and of its owner.

Of the quality of Capability Brown's designs there can be no doubt, and much of the charm of the present landscape at Chilham is directly due to his skill in the provision of a garden which has never, in its essentials, been altered. His one mistake was the spoiling of the terraces, which, however, were put back nearly into their original condition by Sir Edmund Davis.

There were various other matters, interesting in themselves, about which the brothers corresponded. The Heron family solicitor, who seems to have taken almost as much interest in the history of Chilham as its owner, had found (he said) among certain muniments in the Tower of London the Grant of Free Warren in Chilham to Bartholomew de Badlesmere in the reign of Edward II; the details of this Grant Thomas intended to keep strictly to himself as he was uncertain how far its provisions could be extended to the various farms in the parish to the detriment of the Castle estate. The Society of Lincoln's Inn had demanded arrears of Commons which, Thomas said, would fall very heavily on him as he owed a great deal. In Chilham Church the Colebrooke Mausoleum needed repair, and this Thomas was willing to remedy, hoping one day to be able to reclaim the cost from the Colebrooke family. There are frequent references to the training and breeding of horses, in which matters the brothers and Christopher Greaves the Steward took more than a passing interest. It is indeed tempting to speculate that the circular earthwork on the Downs above

Julliberrie's grave, which excavation has shown to be a comparatively modern structure, dates from this time ; that its purpose was a horse-training ring is now quite certain.

From Chilham, Thomas would send to Ireland small presents of a hare, turkeys, "an hamper of apples" with Nonpareils, Aromatic Russets, Lemon Pippins, and Cooking Russets with which "the Gardiner cd not withstand the temptation of putting some brocoli." There was an exchange of melon seeds, Thomas's "Romana" as grown at Chilham being superior to and as early as Richard's less flavoursome Irish stock. From Dublin in return came asparagus seed, and a very handsome bound almanack which Thomas valued for its up-to-date information. Brawn, which was bought from a Mrs. Gill in Canterbury at a cost of £2 17s. 9d. for a collar and a half—"other brawnmakers were not in Character to be depended upon"—was a favourite dish with both families, and Sir Richard often imported it into Ireland. For carriage to Ireland, according to Mrs. Gill, "it must have been in a Barrel with Pickle . . . for that it won't do above 10 days in a Basket."

The brothers were very interested in the progress of Hasted's *History of Kent*, which was at that time approaching completion, and had furnished the author with a very detailed account of Chilham. Hasted was to include in his folio edition an engraving of the Castle made by Bayley from a drawing by the Rev. Sam Rastall, a nephew of the Herons who was Dean of Killaloe in Ireland. Rastall had made his drawing whilst sitting on Julliberrie's grave, a viewpoint which incidentally has found favour with many artists since, and the brothers debated at length with Hasted whether, in the title of the print, mention should be made of Laberius Durus' tomb. Hasted says he "considers that piece of History as an unsupported piece of Tradition," and Thomas, after due consideration, agreed with him, as so large an eminence could not, he thought, have been raised as a barrow. They finally decided that the words "supposed to be the tomb of Quintus Laberius Durus" would place the inscription in proper order.¹

Scattered through the letters are several references to the domestic staff at Chilham. There were fourteen servants in all, seven men and seven maids. Thomas had to part with his butler, who was a "Rank Methodist," and for a new man he was obliged to pay a wage of thirty guineas a year which he considered to be large, "though I am afraid a good one is not to be had for less." And again he writes to Sir Richard, "I want a man as a Groom and Footman to wait constantly at Table, and assist in cutting and bringing in Wood to the Fires, a business necessary to all Servants in this Country, and to assist occasionally in the House." Through a friend of Sir Richard's, a young man applied for the post. "If," says his prospective master,

¹ Hasted, *History of Kent*, Folio edition, Vol. III (1790), p. 125.

“ he understands looking after Horses and he be sober and steady I will not reject him for his want of years.” Whether the youth did come to Chilham or not, we do not know. We can guess, however, and it is not surprising in view of Thomas Heron’s domestic requirements, that the indoor staff were none too happy ; and in 1779 Sir Richard offered his brother a black porter whom he was anxious to place from his own staff, and who “ would go a great way in preserving good order in your Servants’ Hall.”

The most important servant at Chilham in those days was Christopher Greaves, the Steward of the Manor. Not only was he a successful estate manager, farmer, horse-breeder, and lawyer, attributes which might well be found in any good steward, but in addition he had a sound knowledge of architectural practice, of accountancy and finance, and was able to undertake his master’s private commissions abroad. The excellence of his architectural drawing is shown by the north-east elevation of the Castle which appears in *Antiquities of Chilham*, and he was skilled enough to produce a plan for the lay-out of the new stables and out-houses which could be considered side by side with “ Capability” Brown’s. His Estate Accounts, which are still preserved, are models of what such accounts should be, and Thomas thought sufficiently of his mathematical knowledge to place his son under Greaves’ tuition before going up to Cambridge. It is in Greaves’ small precise hand that the *Antiquities of Chilham* is written, and but for his care, little of Thomas Heron’s record at Chilham would have been available.

It would be possible to describe these valuable letters at even greater length, but we must content ourselves by mentioning these four little personal touches which help to make up their charm : Sir Richard’s entreaty that his bed at Chilham may be constantly lain in ; his wife is ill for the want of Tunbridge Wells waters ; Thomas’s childish pleasure at finding that his future wife’s arms impaled with his will make a brave show on the coach¹ and his utter and truthful lack of understanding when Sir Richard refers to his son Bob as a colt.

NOTE.—The portrait of Thomas Heron (facing page 11) is said to be by Romney, but I have been unable to trace its present whereabouts. The photograph from which the illustration was made was lent to me by the late Mr. Charles Hardy, sometime of Chilham Castle.

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¹ Gules, three herons, argent Or, two bars, azure, each charged with a bourulet dauncetto, argent, a chief indented of the Second.

Chilham Castle is a manor house and keep in the village of Chilham, between Ashford and Canterbury in the county of Kent, England. The polygonal Norman keep of the Castle, the oldest building in the village, dates from 1174; still inhabited, it was said to have been built for King Henry II. But archaeological excavations carried out in the 1920s suggest that it stands on the foundations of a much older Anglo-Saxon fortification, possibly dating from the fifth century, and there is evidence of earlier HERON, Sir ROBERT (1765–1854), politician, born at Newark on 27 Nov. 1765, was only son of Thomas Heron of Chilham Castle, Kent, recorder of Newark (who died 28 April 1794), by his first wife, Anne, elder daughter of Sir Edward Wilmot, bart., M.D. He succeeded to the baronetcy on the death of his uncle, Sir Richard Heron [q. v.], in 1805. In childhood he was very feeble, his mother died on 30 April 1767, and he was brought up by strangers. He was educated from the age of eight by the Rev. John Skynner 1765, o. surv. s. of Thomas Heron of Chilham Castle, Kent, recorder of Newark, by 1st w. Anne, da. of Sir Edward Wilmot, 1st Bt., of Chaddesden, Derbys. educ. by Rev. John Skynner at Easton, nr. Stamford 1773; L. Inn 1775; St. John's Camb. 1783; Grand Tour with Robert Deverell* 1784-5. m. 9 Jan. 1792, Amelia, da. of Sir Horatio Mann*, 2nd Bt., of Linton, Kent, s.p. suc. fa. 1794; uncle Sir Richard Heron as 2nd Bt. 18 Jan.