THE

ANCIENT BOROUGHS OF CORNWALL, WITH NOTES ON THEIR ARMS AND DEVICES.

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YEARS turn politics into history, and make partisanship archæology. Had the British Archæological Association been in existence, and held a congress in Cornwall, half a century since, my present subject must have been tabooed. Angry passions would have been roused by the merest hint concerning it, and the meeting whereat it was introduced would have been far more lively than pleasant. But the old system has been dead so long, and 1832, with all its controversies, is now so far back, that the peculiarities which made Cornwall famous in the electoral history of England are in the recollection of very few. As one of the most curious phases in the history of the county, I beg to offer a few notes concerning them.

Prior to the date of the first Reform Bill, Cornwall swarmed with parliamentary constituencies. I will not say that every fishing village and every hamlet sent representatives to the House of Commons; but assuredly the dingiest and meanest of them did, while two of the largest towns, Falmouth and Penzance, with the ancient mining centre of Redruth, had no voice in the legislature whatever. Before the disfranchisement in 1824 of the village borough of Grampound, for the most shameless bribery and corruption, Cornwall contained twenty-one parliamentary boroughs, and with the two knights of the shire returned forty-four members of Parliament,—one less only than the number returned by the whole kingdom of Scotland. In two instances, what was practically one town, was by an ingenious process of subdivision made to return four members. The total population of the twenty-one borough constituencies, half a century ago, did not reach 40,000, and they had between them less than 2,000 voters. In only half a dozen instances were there more than fifty voters to a borough, and in two cases there were less than ten.

This very remarkable endowment of political power arose entirely from the connection of the county with the crown through the duchy, as Borlase in his *History* clearly shows. Originally Cornwall was not more favoured than other counties, and only seven towns therein contributed to the Parliaments of Edward I. It is interesting to note that five of these still retain their privileges, while of all those added subsequently only two survive. The ancient constitution was, therefore, substantially sound. From the time of the early Edwards no change was made in the parliamentary representation of the county, worthy of note, until the reign of Edward VI. Then borough-making began, and was continued during the next two reigns, the duchy of Cornwall, during all three, being vested in the Crown. Prior to the 6th of Edward VI, the parliamentary boroughs were Bodmin, Helston, Launceston, Liskeard, Lostwithiel, and Truro. Edward added Camelford, Grampound, Michell (or St. Michael), Newport, Saltash, Tintagel, and West Looe; Mary, Penryn and St. Ives; Elizabeth, Callington, East Looe, Fowey, St. Germans, St. Mawes, and Tregony.

Not four of these fourteen constituencies were in any way entitled to this distinction on the score of wealth, population, influence, or peculiar antiquity. For the most part they were petty villages or hamlets, possessing no corporate character, and recommended only by their utter insignificance and presumed subserviency. In the majority of cases they were indeed old boroughs in the legal sense, as having been endowed with privileges by their early lords; but as Borlase observes, while they had thus "acquired a kind of nominal dignity", they "were in every other light inconsiderable". Besides, there were several that had not even this very shadowy claim to notice.

Why these boroughs were created is no very difficult problem to solve. The Tudors did their best to bring low the great nobles, and as one means to that end, neglected no opportunity of strengthening their power in the Commons. Cornwall, from its dependence on the duchy, offered peculiar facilities for effecting this design. It is not a little curious to note how, in process of time, precisely the opposite effect was produced. As the power of the duchy and of the Crown prerogative waned, these petty boroughs fell for the most part under the control of the very aristocracy

whom they were created to curb, while the exceptions were faithful only to the deepest pocket. The peerage patronage of the Cornish boroughs was stated by Oldfield at the end of the last century to be vested as follows, and there is no doubt as to his substantial accuracy:—Helston, the Duke of Leeds; Launceston and Newport, the Duke of Northumberland; St. Mawes, the Marquis of Buckingham; Lostwithiel, and Bossiney or Tintagel (1), the Earl of Mount Edgcumbe; Truro, Viscount Falmouth; Callington, Lord Clinton; Liskeard and St. Germans, Lord Eliot; Penryn, Lord de Dunstanville. The commoners who either nominated directly, or indirectly influenced the returns, were:—Bossiney or Tintagel (1), Hon. James Wortley Stuart; Bodmin, Sir John Morshead; Camelford, Sir Jonathan Phillips; East and West Looe and Saltash, Mr. Buller; Fowey (1), Mr. Rashleigh; Grampound and Michell, Sir Christopher Hawkins; St. Ives, Mr. Praed; Tregony, Mr. Barwell.

Among the eminent men who sat in Parliament for these constituencies we find—James Macpherson ("*Ossian*") and Lord Brougham, Camelford; John Hampden, Grampound; Sir Walter Raleigh and Richard Carew, the historian, Michell; Sir John Eliot, Newport and St. Germans; Noye, the Attorney-General, Godolphin, the lord treasurer, and Davies Gilbert, P.R.S., Helston; Sir Bevil Grenvil and John Anstis (Garter), Launceston; Sir Edward Coke, Gibbon, the historian, and Huskisson, Liskeard; William Hampden, father of John Hampden, East Looe; Sir William Petty and Sir Charles Wager, West Looe; Joseph Addison, Lostwithiel; Sir Francis Drake, Tintagel; Waller, the poet, and Lord Clarendon, Saltash.

The representation of the boroughs was, however, mainly enjoyed by the more distinguished county families under whose patronage they were. Where the right to the franchise was connected with property, the chief landlords had naturally the preponderant influence; but where the election lay in the hands of the corporation, the patron was by no means so secure, and the more popularly constituted constituencies were the occasion of many hot contests and much shrewd diplomacy. Among the names of most frequent occurrence in the parliamentary records of the county are those of Arundell, St. Aubyn, Basset, Boscawen,

Buller, Carew, Carminow, Daniell, Eliot, Enys, Edgcumbe, Godolphin, Grenvil, Hawkins, Kendall, Killigrew, Manaton, Morshead, Noye, Penrose, Rashleigh, Robartes, Roscarrock, Trefusis, Trelawny, Tremayne, Trevanion, Vivian, Vyvyan, and Wrey.

The fights between the respective would-be patrons, where the territorial rights were inconclusive, or corporations divided, were sometimes of the most desperate character. Nothing was left undone that could tend to secure a superiority. Where the franchise depended on occupation, and the houses and lands in the borough belonged wholly or in great part to one proprietor, the voters were of course merely his creatures; but where there were corporations, though these were universally self-elected, they required to be humoured. It was customary for the patron to defray the chief corporate expenses, and if he was not a member of the corporate body himself, he had generally his representative—a friend or steward—amongst the corporators, so that he might be kept informed of whatever was in progress. The post commonly affected was that of recorder. The larger constituencies, when the popular elements of scot and lot voting or potwalloping were present, required very delicate handling. Upon one occasion the electors of Grampound, offended with the steward of their patron (because, like a wise man, he preferred to pay after an election, when he was sure of value received), went in a body and offered the command of the borough to another patron, who was subsequently ousted in turn by the tact and substantial arguments of Sir Christopher Hawkins.

An amusing illustration of the lengths to which patronage contests went is given by the Rev. J. J. Wilkinson in a paper on the borough of Camelford, published in the *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall.* Lord Yarmouth was contesting the command of the borough with Lord Darlington, who owned the greater part of the town; and in order that his voters might be properly accommodated, built a large house in compartments for them. Lord Darlington, as the freeholder, claimed the minerals, and accordingly, when the house was nearly completed, exploded a mine and blew it up. He had to pay for the damage, but he kept his superiority. This was only in 1823.

The Reform Bill of 1832 swept away thirteen of the

twenty boroughs then existing, and considerably extended the boundaries of those that were left—Bodmin, Helston, Liskeard, Launceston, St. Ives, Penryn, Truro—besides reducing St. Ives, Helston, Liskeard, and Launceston to one member each. Thus, instead of forty-four, the county members were cut down to fourteen, the representation of the county proper having been doubled. Since then the only material change that has taken place has been the abstraction of one member from Bodmin. When parliamentary privileges departed, municipal were little heeded, and of the towns disfranchised in 1832, Saltash, East Looe, Lostwithiel, and Camelford, alone retain their corporate character.

I append a list of all the boroughs in the county, parliamentary or other, of which I have been able to obtain particulars, with details under each head of dates of creation and cessation, character of franchise, arms, devices, etc. It will be seen that, in addition to the parliamentary boroughs of the period immediately preceding the Reform Bill, there were at least five others—Falmouth, Marazion, Penzance, Millbrook, and Padstow, of which the three former still exist.

Bodmin.—The original charter of this town appears to have been from the famous Richard, Earl of Cornwall, and king of the Romans, who granted a guild merchant. Roger de Bodmyn, 1359, is the first mayor whose name has been preserved. The borough has sent representatives to Parliament since 23rd Edward I [1294]. The constituency before 1832 consisted of the mayor and burgesses. Of the burgesses twelve were called capital burgesses and councillors, and the other twenty-four were common-councilmen, so that there were thirty-six in all. In 1832 the borough was enlarged by its extension to the entire parish of Bodmin, and the inclusion of the parishes of Lanhydrock, Helland, and Lanivet. In 1868 one of the two members was taken away. The device on the seal is a king seated under a canopy.

Bossiney.—Bossiney *alias* Trevena, *alias* Tintagel, *alias* Dundagil, also dated its privileges from Richard, King of the Romans. It was made a parliamentary borough by Edward VI. There was no corporation, but the constituency consisted of a titular mayor and titular freemen, the right of election presumably being in those who had free

land in the borough and who lived in the parish. In 1781 only one of these titular corporators was left in existence—a certain Arthur Wade. But he was equal to the occasion, and single-handed elected the two members. The elections were held on a mound still remaining, by the village of Bossiney. It was considered a part of the duty of the representatives of Bossiney periodically to get drunk with their constituents. The device on the borough seal was a castle on the waves, evidently an allusion to the Castle of Tintagel. When the borough was disfranchised, the shadow of corporate life also died.

Callington.—This parliamentary borough, the last created in the county, sending members from the 27th Elizabeth until 1832, never had a corporation, arms, or seal, the returning officer being the manorial portreeve. The right of voting was in certain burgage tenures, paying scot and lot.

Camelford.—Here we have another of the creations of Richard, King of the Romans, though parliamentary privileges were first conferred by Edward VI. There were many disputes in this town concerning the right to the franchise, which was claimed on the one hand by the inhabitant householders paying scot and lot, and on the other by the freemen. In 1796 it was decided that the franchise was in such of the burgesses as were resident householders, and paid scot and lot. The device of the borough seal is founded on a blunder—a canting allusion to the fancied meaning of the name of the town—and represents a camel passing a ford. Whereas the word Camel has no reference to the animal of that name, and simply means the "crooked river". The municipal corporation has survived the fatal '32.

Falmouth.—This is the youngest of the corporate towns of the county, having been incorporated 1661, at the instance of the Killigrews, lords of the manor. The device on the seal consists of the arms of the Killigrews—a double-headed eagle displayed, charged with a rock and pole on the body and a castle on each wing. The rock represents the Black Rock in the mouth of Falmouth harbour, and the castles the guardian fortresses of Pendennis and St. Mawes. In 1832 Falmouth became a member of the borough of Penryn, and the united boroughs have since been known as the borough of Penryn and Falmouth.

Fowey.—The ancient and famous seaport of Fowey was

represented continuously from the reign of Elizabeth until 1832. It was first incorporated by James II, and lost its municipal privileges under *quo warranto* a few years before it fell under Schedule A. The right of election was in the tenants of the Duke of Cornwall who were capable of being elected portreeves, and the inhabitants paying scot and lot. Those only could vote for or be elected portreeves who were freeholders of the manor of the borough. The device of the borough was a three-masted man-of-war sailing.

St. Germans.—This borough, though returning members from the reign of Elizabeth until 1832, never had either corporation, arms, or seal. The returning officer was the manor portreeve, and the electors those householders who had resided in the borough a year.

Grampound.—John of Eltham was the first who is known to have granted privileges to this town. It returned members to Parliament from the reign of Edward VI to 1824, when it was disfranchised, on account of corrupt practices. Not that it was much worse than its neighbours, but that it had been found out. The right of election was in the inhabitants paying scot and lot. The corporation had long existed by prescription simply; and has now been many years extinct. The device on the seal is a two-arched bridge, with a shield of the duchy arms thereon. This bridge refers to the assumed origin of the name in the French Grandpont, which in its turn is said to have been a translation of the ancient British name Ponsmur, an *alias* which appears upon the seal.

Helston.—This is unquestionably an ancient borough, for it had charters from King John, and it sent representatives to Parliament so early as 23rd Edward I. Under the old *régime* the right of election was in the corporation only, and when in 1774 a new charter was granted, in consequence of the reduction of the corporators under the old, six of the corporation under the old charter returned two members to Parliament, and had their rights upheld against the corporators under the new. But at length, in 1790, there only remained one survivor of the old corporation—Richard Pennel, and he returned the two members by himself. Then it was decided, contrary to the former decision, that the right was in the new corporation. The device on the seal is St. Michael killing the dragon; on the

battlements of some edifice. The saint has on his arm a shield charged with three lions—the arms of England. Since 1832 the borough has only returned one member.

St. Ives.—This borough owes its origin, as a parliamentary constituency, to Philip and Mary. It was first incorporated municipally by Charles I in 1639. The right of election lay in the inhabitants paying scot and lot. Before 1832 two members were returned, and one was then taken away. The canting arms are an ivy branch overspreading the whole field *vert.* But the parish is named from the patron saint, St. Iva.

Launceston.—This borough, in conjunction with that of Newport, formed but one town, returning four members. It was made a free borough by Richard, King of the Romans, and has been represented in Parliament since 23rd Edward I. It was incorporated as a municipality in 1555. The right of election was in the mayor, aldermen, and freemen being inhabitants at the time they were made free, and not receiving pay of the parish. The arms evidently bore reference to the castle, being a triple circular tower, within a border charged with eight towers domed. The crest is a lion's head between two ostrich plumes, all rising out of a ducal coronet. Launceston, with Newport and a wide suburban area, now returns one member only.

Liskeard.—This town was made a free borough in 1240 by Richard King of the Romans, and is one of the oldest parliamentary constituencies in the county, its representation commencing in 1294. Prior to the Bill of 1832, which deprived it of one of its members, at the same time extending its boundaries, the franchise was vested in the corporation and the sworn free burgesses. The device on the seal is a fleur-de-lis, two martlets on the arms thereof; above, two annulets; and below, on each side, a feather. This is mentioned in the Visitation of 1574. The fleur-de-lis has an evident reference, though a blundering one, to the first syllable of the name of the town.

Lostwithiel.—This is another of the boroughs made free by Richard King of the Romans, and sent members to Parliament almost continuously from 1304 until 1832, if not from 1294. It was not incorporated municipally until 1623. The right of election lay in the corporation. The device on the borough seal is a castle standing on waves,

therein two fishes hauriant. On each side of the castle is a thistle. The castle probably refers to the ancient duchy castle of Restormel, the water to the river and harbour of Fowey, over which the corporation had jurisdiction. This municipality still exists.

The Looes.—East and West Looe, though for all practical purposes one town only severed by the little estuary of the Looe, constituted two boroughs, returning four members. West Looe *alias* Louborough, *alias* Portpighan, *alias* Portuan, had the privilege of sending representatives from Edward VI, East Looe from Elizabeth. Both received municipal charters from the latter monarch. In each the right of election was in the mayor, burgesses, and freemen; and when disfranchised in 1832, the joint populations of the twin boroughs, with their four members, was 1,458, and the voters a little over 100. The corporation of East Looe still continues. The device upon its seal is a one-masted ship, charged with three escutcheons of the arms of the Bodrigans, *argent* three bendlets *gules*. The once famous Bodrigans were early lords of the town, and as the seal is much more ancient than the reign of Elizabeth, it is evident that an older corporation than that which she chartered existed. The device on the West Looe seal is an archer armed, holding a bow in one hand and an arrow in the other. The corporation of West Looe was suffered to expire, it is said under an idea that the last survivors would be entitled to the corporate estate. When, however, the charter was forfeited, the duchy resumed the properties, and they have since been regranted to trustees for the benefit of the inhabitants. So ended the West Looe corporate tontine.

Marazion.—Beyond doubt this is one of the most ancient towns in Cornwall, though the charter of its present corporation dates no further back than 1595. Hals, the Cornish historian, states that, prior to the dissolution of the monastery on St. Michael's Mount, Marazion returned members to Parliament, and thereafter ceased, on the score of poverty. And probably there is some foundation for this, since we find that members were elected under the existing charter, and that Thomas Westlake and Richard Myll were returned in 1658, though it does not appear that they ever took their seats. The device on the corporate seals is a rude castle with central and flanking towers.

St. Mawes.—This was one of the most miserable boroughs in Cornwall. A mere fishing hamlet, with neither corporation, church, chapel, school, nor market, it sent representatives to Parliament from the reign of Elizabeth until 1832, while the thriving borough of Falmouth, on the other side of the harbour, had no voice whatever in the councils of the nation. The seal of the borough bears a bend lozengy *or*, between a tower in sinister chief and a ship with three masts and sails furled in dexter base. The field is stated to be *azure*, the tower *arg.*, and the ship *or*.

St. Michael.—St. Michael *alias* Mitchell, *alias* Modishole, represented from the 6th Edward VI to 1832, never had either corporation, arms, or seal. The right of election was once in the burghers, then in two elizors appointed by the lord of the manor, and twenty-two freemen chosen by the elizors; then in the inhabitants at large not receiving alms; then in a high lord and five deputy lords, a portreeve appointed by the high lord from the latter, and the inhabitants paying scot and lot. The borough eventually fell into the hands of two proprietors, and, these differing, there was a contest at the last election before 1832. There were then only five voters; and the second candidate won by three votes against two recorded for the last on the poll, the first polling five.

Millbrook.—Of the ancient corporation of Millbrook no vestige remains except the seal, the holder of which styles himself the borough reeve. Millbrook was once a flourishing little seaport, but has long been a mere village. According to Hals, it once sent representatives to Parliament, but was excused on the score of poverty. I am not aware that there is the slightest proof of this. The device on the seal is very quaint—a mill standing on a brook. The stream runs through a wooded country, and dogs are scattered among the trees.

Newport.—This borough is now included with Launceston, of which town it is properly a part. Before 1832 it returned two members. It had no corporation, arms, or seal. The returning officers were two vianders appointed at the manor court leet, and the voters the inhabitants paying scot and lot.

Padstow.—This little port once had a corporation, of which, according to Carew in his "Survey", the inhabitants

purchased the right, *temp.* Elizabeth; but it has long ceased to exist, and hardly a trace of it remains. The device on the seal was a three-masted ship of war upon the waves, sails furled, and anchor at prow; and has been reproduced in the seal of the Padstow Local Board.

Penzance.—This, the most westerly town in England, was incorporated by James I in 1614. It never returned members to Parliament. The device of the town seal—the head of the Baptist in a charger—is clearly intended to allude to the name of the borough, which has been interpreted to mean the holy headland, or the saint's head, but which in all probability means simply the head of the bay. It has been suggested that the arms refer to the connection of the Knights Hospitallers with the parish of Madron, in which Penzance is situated, but there is no real foundation for this beyond the mere coincidence.

Penryn.—Walter Bronescombe, Bishop of Exeter and lord of the manor, first enfranchised this town in 1275. Edward VI gave it the right to elect representatives, and it was incorporated by James I in 1619. The right of election was in the corporation, and the inhabitants paying scot and lot. Since 1832 it has been associated with Falmouth. The device on the seal—a man's head wreathed, with ribbons floating—is apparently founded on Carew's explanation of the name Penryn as meaning a "curled head", whereas the more probable signification is "head of the river channel".

Saltash.—Reginald de Valletort made Saltash a free borough early in the thirteenth century, and this was confirmed by several monarchs. Edward VI gave it the privilege of returning two members, which it enjoyed until it fell within Schedule A. The right of election was variously determined to be in the corporation, and in thirty-six burgage tenures. At one time, of its two members, one represented the corporate and the other the burgage votes, two committees of the House of Commons, to whom appeal had been made, having given contradictory decisions. The corporation still exists, and enjoys extensive rights over the Tamar, with the levy of dues in Plymouth Sound. Moreover, it is said by accident, it still holds Quarter Sessions before its corporate-appointed Recorder. There were two seals, one bearing a three-masted ship in full sail, and the

other the arms of the duchy, a lion rampant within a bordure bezantée, water beneath the escutcheon, and on either side an ostrich feather labelled. The first seal was lost on the occasion of a dispute among the members of the corporation.

Truro.—This is a very ancient borough, which, according to the visitation of 1574, was incorporated by Raynold, Earl of Cornwall, base son to Henry I; formerly by Richard Lucy. Henry II is said to have given its first royal charter. It commenced its parliamentary representation in 1294, and, prior to 1832, the right of election was in the mayor and corporation—twenty-five in number. The Reform Bill extended the constituency and the area of the borough, but left it both its members. The arms of Truro, according to the visitation of 1620, are, on a base barry wavy of four, charged with two fish, a three-masted ship in full sail. And this is the device on the seal, the fishes swimming to the right in pale.

Tregony.—Here we have an exceedingly ancient borough, the modern representative of the Roman station Cenia, whence, with the prefix Tre, the name. It elected representatives in 1294, and once subsequently in the same reign, thence intermitting, until restored by Elizabeth. Until municipally incorporated by James I, the town was under the jurisdiction of a portreeve, who still continued joint returning officer. The election here was in the potwallopers who had been resident for six weeks—the widest and loosest franchise recognised in any Cornish borough. Tregony fell under Schedule A, and its municipality has also been long extinct. It was one of the three Cornish boroughs recognised at the Visitation of 1620 as having arms, a pomegranate seeded, clipped, and leaved.