

A Castle, a Railway and a Garden

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Report and photographs by HUGH BAX

"Drifting banners tell their progress to the counties".

We start with the train. The morning was sunny and bright, with a cool south-east wind blowing across the sky, as has been the climatic pattern of recent weeks.

The coach bore us first to Tenterden and dropped us at the New Town station, where we were to take the East Kent and Sussex Railway to Northiam. We had an hour to stroll around and look at the sights. Some penetrated Tenterden as far as St. Michael's Church. Others explored the delightfully preserved and romantic station and railway yard.

We examined the booking hall and ticket office, walked along the platform, visited the "usual offices" (only two authentic) and admired the tank engines and the red coaches. There was a Pullman and an L.M.S. and an energetic plate-layer doing his stuff. We found our way to the refreshment room, where we sat on hard wooden chairs at little wooden tables, taking tea and biscuits. We enjoyed the old advertisements, which the older members of the group remembered so well; Coal Tar

Soap, Lyon's Tea and one that must have mystified our younger members, a handsome head of a zebra, inscribed with the words "Zebra Blacking". I was sorry not to see "Virol - Growing Girls Need It". We found everyone's favourite seaside poster; "Skegness is so bracing".

The short journey across Romney Marsh to Northiam was cheering. The coaches (I was in was an ancient L.M.S. one), although worn and battered-looking were spacious and felt comfortable. The marsh, green and glowing, was lovely in the late May sun. Streams of smoke from our handsome engine blew gently away across the meadows, bright with spring flowers. The little stations were clean and tidy, except for Tenterden. Rolvenden seemed to be the Swindon of this engineering enterprise, exhibiting bits of locomotives, broken boilers and bogies

ONE OF THE WELL-PRESERVED ENGINES



18 lying upside down with their wheels in the air. Then too soon the journey came to an end just as we were enjoying ourselves in the little train on a remarkably smooth line gliding between the villages.

"I do love these ancient ruins

*We never tread upon them but we set
Our feet upon some ancient history".*

We rejoined our coach, which took us to Bodiam Castle. This castellated, fortified mansion is set on a green hill overlooking the river delta. The castle is a jewel and its setting enchanting. Green hillocks and meadows studded with trees surround it

A STRIKING VIEW OF ONE OF THE TOWERS OF BODIAM CASTLE



and, seeing its picturesqueness, one is in danger of forgetting that its original purpose was not primarily aesthetic but fiercely defensive. It was built as a defence against the French by Sir Edward Dalyngrigge between 1385 and 1392. It has four similar towers, one at each corner, three rectangular and the magnificent twin towers of the gatehouse. We walk up to the National Trust office and museum, which contains interesting artifacts of farm, kitchen and armoury, recovered from the grounds at various times.

Turning to look back at the castle, we see an architectural wonder set in a beautiful moat, approached by a long, wooden bridge. When we enter the castle we enter a ruin, open to the sky. The domestic buildings which once ranged around the great courtyard have nearly all been dismantled. Only doorways, windows and fireplaces on the curtain wall give any indication of the original arrangements. But it has been possible for scholars to plot the ordering of the Great Hall, chapel, kitchen, refectory and other offices and it is comparatively easy to let the imagination work and people the castle's interior and to become aware that, as much as it was a place of formidable defence, Bodiam Castle was also a comfortable manor house. Sir Edward Dalyngrigge had prospered from his activities during the French wars. After the War of the Roses the castle seems to have fallen into a long slumber. After the Civil War it was partially dismantled and during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries fell into picturesque, ivy-clad ruin. It was saved by Lord Curzon who,



above: DIXTER HOUSE

below: BODIAM CASTLE





THE FLOWER GARDEN, DIXTER HOUSE

who, on his return from the vice-royalty of India in 1905, saw it, fell in love with it, bought it and restored it. We owe him much.

*How could such sweet and winsome hours
Be reckoned but with heaven's flowers?*

It was time to move on to Great Dixter, from mediaeval defensive manor to Tudor half-timbered house, brilliantly restored by Lutyens in 1910. What a pleasure it was to hear again the romantic story of the discovery and restoration of the house by the Lloyd family, to admire the wonderful wood-work of the Great Hall and the easy comfort of the salon. Many of our members will know that Mr. Christopher Lloyd writes a weekly letter on his garden for "Country Life".

We were shown the room where this work is carried out and a complete bound set of "Country Life", the only one in existence, as the magazine's own copy was destroyed by bombs during the war.

It was to the garden that we eagerly turned after viewing the house. Our

appetites had been whetted by the delightful meadow in front of the house, where grasses and wild flowers are allowed to grow naturally, presenting to the view a colourful tableau. Nowadays all around the beds and borders of the garden the wild flowers are allowed to grow and the effect is very pleasing. There are many flowering shrubs and climbers which I cannot name and the sunken garden is a kaleidoscope of colour, as much from foliage as flowers, grey, red and green. The famous long border is filled with plants developing their strength for their high summer glory, with the last of the tulips and bands of many striking lupins, blue, white and purple, and along the great border forget-me-nots, allowed almost complete freedom, so that the whole is seen through a blue haze.

After surveying the garden, we had the pleasurable task of resisting the temptation to buy some of the many delights on offer in the nursery, where Mr. Lloyd himself appeared, accompanied by the largest dachshund I have ever seen.

Another excellent Dover Society outing, splendidly organised and arranged by Joan Liggett.