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NARRATIVE OF THE TAKING OF MR. CRISPE FROM QUEKS

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Mr Urban, October 20

Among your numerous readers there are few who have not occasionally visited the Isle of Thanet; and many of them must recollect the venerable mansion called Quekes, about three quarters of a mile S.E. of Birchington. To such, the view now sent you, taken in 1871, will probably prove acceptable; and the rather, as the old house has recently been entirely modernised by the present very respectable owner, John Roberts, esq. of Kingsgate.

The following account of this curious old house was published in 1787, in the XLVth number of the "Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica"; one of the many works, which are now become rare by the calamity, recorded in your last volume, p.99.

"The town of Birchington was antiently the Manor, as this was the seat of the Quekes, which family ended in a daughter, who was married to Mr. Crispe, of Stanlake, in Oxfordshire. Henry Crispe was Sheriff of Kent, and had such influence in these parts, that he was styled *Regulus Insulae Thaneti*: he died in 1575, leaving two sons: one of which, Sir Nicholas, dying in 1651, gave his estate to his nephew Henry Crispe, esq. who was commonly called *Bonjour Crispe*, on account of his being carried into France, where he was some time and learned no more French than *bonjour*, or *good-morrow*. He' having only one son, Sir William Crispe, who died before him, gave his seat and the estate belonging to it to his nephew Thomas Crispe, esq., who died in 1680, and was left four daughters, co-heirs. At this house King William the third, used to reside, till the winds favoured his embarking for Holland. A room, said to be the bedchamber of the Royal Guest, is still shewn. His guards encamped in an adjoining enclosure. This antient seat, like most others of the same rank, is fast going to ruin: the weather penetrates into most of the apartments (particularly westwards of the porch), which have been the principal ones; the tiles are blown off in many places, the windows demolished, and no part of it inhabited, or indeed fit to be, except a small portion at the end, which is occupied by a farmer. A few tears will probably reduce the building to what may be seen eastward of the porch, as it is in agitation to pull the remainder down; a very fine suite of apartments at the north-west corner has been demolished this summer (1781); and as any of the inhabited part of the building may want repair, or purchasers for the materials can be procured, the rest will share the same fate. The whole of this building is of brick, except the large stone window at the southeast corner, and the bottom of the southwest window. From this house, Henry Crispe, esq, a man of great property, who had been High Sheriff of the county, was surprised and carried prisoner to the Spanish Netherlands. As this was an undeniable fact, and the only instance of this kind ever known in this kingdom,

it should seem to deserve notice. I could, therefore, wish to perpetuate (as far as publication of this sort may presume to perpetuate the memory of so singular an event. Those who do not think themselves interested in this story are at full liberty to pass over it. I give it in the words of the author of the Margate guide: “ Henry Crispe, esq. of Quex in the Island of Thanet, in Kent, was, in August 1657, forcibly and violently, in the night time, without his will, taken and carried out from his then dwelling- house at Quex, in the parish of Birchington, near the seaside. By certain Englishmen and others, and by force carried to Bruges in Flanders, and detained there as a prisoner, till three thousand pounds should be paid for his ransom. Henry Crispe. A few days after his arrival at Bruges, sent to his brother’s son, Thomas Crispe, esq. who then lived near Quex, to come over to him at Bruges, to give him assistance in those great exigencies and extremities; and accordingly he went over to him, and after some advice taken there, Henry Crispe dispatched his nephew, Thomas Crispe, into England, there to join his endeavours, together with the endeavours of his son, Sir Nicholas Crispe, knight, then in England, for his ransom and enlargement, and to raise money for that purpose; both which they found great difficulty to effect, because that Oliver Cromwell having at that time taken upon his government of the nation, and suspecting that the taking away Mr Crispe was only a collusion, whereby to colour the lending or giving three thousand pounds to King Charles the second then beyond the seas: Oliver Cromwell and his Junta did call a council, and made an order that the said Henry Crispe should not be ransomed; whereupon much difficulty arose to procure a licence to ransom Henry Crispe, which put Sir Nicholas Crispe , and the said Thomas Crispe, to great trouble and expense to obtain the licence and to raise money. And after the death of Sir Nicholas Crispe, he returned back to Bruges, to acquaint Henry Crispe that he could not raise sufficient money in England for his ransom to be suddenly done without the sale of some part of his estate; and thereupon he empowered his nephew Thomas Crispe , and one Robert Darrel, esq. to make sale of some lands for that purpose, and all care and diligence was used to hasten the ransom; and Thomas Crispe, in the winter’s dangerous season of the year, six times passed the seas, to comfort and confer with his uncle Henry Crispe, in order to remove all obstructions, and to raise money to redeem him out of his imprisonment at Bruges, where he was eight months before he released, and then returned to Quex, and died there, July 25, 1663.” The above memorial (continues the author already quoted) was communicated to me in August 1776 by the late Hon. Mrs Rooke, of St Lawrence near Canterbury. It was found among the writings of the estate at Stonar in this island, of which she was then the proprietor, but which formerly belonged to Mr Crispe, and was mortgaged for his ransom.

“Such other anecdotes as I have been able to obtain relative to this matter, by the most cautious and diligent enquiry among persons of good credit, are to the following effect:

“The enterprise was contrived and executed by Captain Golding of Ramsgate; he was a sanguine Royalist, and during the time that King Charles the second had taken refuge in France, he ran away with a very valuable merchant ship which he commanded (the Blackamoor Queen); and having sold both ship

and cargo for a large sum of money, he gave it all to the King, to supply his necessities. Golding was ever after in great favour with him; he was brought into England at the Reformation, and had the command of the Diamond man of war, on board of which he was killed, on an engagement with four Dutch frigates, in May 1665. Echard makes honourable mention of him, by the name "the brave Captain Golding". The affair was thus conducted: the party landed at Gore End, near Birchington, and at Quex took Mr. Crispe out of his bed without the least resistance. They conveyed him in his own coach to the seaside, where he was forced into an open boat, without one of his domesticks being allowed to attend him, although that favour was earnestly requested. He was conveyed first to Ostend, and from thence to Bruges, both of which places were in the power of Spain, which had been at war with England for more than two years. It appears that Mr Crispe (for what reason it is not known) had been for some time under apprehensions of just such an attack. Loopholes, for the discharge of muskets, were made on different parts of the house; and he is said to have afforded very generous entertainments to such of his neighbours as would lodge there to defend him. But all his precautions had no effect.

"The knowledge of some other little incidents relating to this matter was obtained, but they were too trifling to deserve notice. No care was taken to preserve the memory of this event, in the parish of Birchington; and it cost me infinite pains to investigate the traces of a fact, which had, for so many years, been buried in oblivion. I am well convinced of the truth of the relation myself, or it should never have been published, to impose on the credulity of others".

The present House is a very elegant and convenient structure, and in one of the rooms are preserved several curious vestiges of its antient story: particularly two disbelievers, one representing Mr. Crispe in his bed, the other the mode of his being seized and carried off.

*A like attempt was made, but fortunately prevented, on the famous Sir Thomas Spencer. See the History of Canonbury House. EDITOR.