



*Engraved by J. Gray from a Drawing by F.W.L. Stockdale.*

*Spres Tower, Rye, Sussex.*

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*A Concise Historical & Topographical Sketch of Hastings, Winchelsea, & Rye*

including also several other places in the vicinity of those Ancient Towns

Embellished with numerous engravings, from original drawings

by **Frederick Wilton Litchfield Stockdale**

## **RYE**

Which is also a member of the Cinque Ports, is situated upon an eminence, westward of the mouth of the River Rother, at the eastern extremity of the county, and two miles and a half from Winchelsea.

The earliest notice to be traced of it in history, under its present name, is on the occasion of the Danes landing near it, in the year 893, when they seized the Castle of Apuldore, in Kent. According to *Lambard*, Edward the Confessor gave the towns of Rye and Winchelsea to the abbot and monks of Fescamp, in Normandy; but Henry the Third, in the thirty-first year of his reign, for the better defence of England, resumed possession of both these towns, giving, in exchange for them, the manor of Cheltenham and Selover, in Gloucestershire, and other lands in the county of Lincoln. The tempest which overwhelmed the old town of Winchelsea, occasioned also a very considerable change in the

situation of Rye, and completely altered the course of the River Rother, which before that event discharged itself into the sea, at Romney.

In the reign of Edward the Third, Rye was enclosed with walls, and fortified by gateways, some of which are yet remaining, although in a ruinous condition: the north, or Land Gate, leading into Kent, is the most perfect, and has a very handsome Gothic arch, guarded on each side with a round tower. There is also remaining, the *Tower*, founded in the twelfth century by William de Ipres, earl of Kent, and which has a venerable and picturesque appearance: it has been used as a prison ever since the Town-Hall was completed. Beneath it is a battery of eighteen guns.

Notwithstanding these precautions, Rye was, in the year 1377, taken by the French, who landed from five vessels, and, after plundering it, set it on fire, and, as Stowe remarks, “within five hours brought it wholly unto ashes, with the Church, that then was there, of wonderful beauty, conveying away four of the richest of that town prisoners, and slaying sixty-six, left not above eight in the town: forty-two hogsheads of wine they carried thence to their ships, with the rest of their booty, and left the town desolate.” During the reign of Henry the Sixth, it was a second time destroyed by the French, when all the old records and charters belonging to it are supposed to have perished, excepting a few fragments, dated in the twenty-seventh year of that king’s reign. Henry the Seventh visited Rye in the third year of his reign; also Queen Elizabeth in the year 1573, while on a tour round the coast.

In the sixteenth century, the *Harbour* of Rye, which had for many years been in a decayed state, was restored in consequence of the violence of a very extraordinary tempest: and about twelve years ago was rendered sufficiently commodious to enable vessels of two hundred tons burden to come up to the quay to load and unload. This great improvement in Rye Harbour, (and which had for many years been deemed impracticable, owing to the heavy sea and powerful influx and reflux of the tide,) was effected by a dam of a singular construction, invented by the Rev. Daniel Pape, L.L.B. and to whom the Society of Arts granted a gold medal.

In the year 1673, king Charles the Second reviewed the English and French fleets lying in Rye Bay, within sight of the town. As Winchelsea declined, Rye is said to have become of greater consequence, from its enjoying a commodious harbour, and which, in boisterous weather, has often proved of the greatest relief to vessels beating about upon the raging ocean; particularly on the occasions when two of our kings were compelled to seek shelter in it on their return from the Continent; viz. George the First, in January 1725, and his successor, in December 1736.

The town of Rye, as before-mentioned, being a member of the Cinque Ports, also enjoys similar privileges and immunities. The corporation, which is held by prescription, consists of a mayor, jurats, and freemen, who have had the right of electing two members to serve in parliament ever since the forty-second of Henry the Third. The present members are, *Richard Arkenwright* and *John Maberly*, esqs.

The Church, in consequence of having undergone very considerable repair and alteration during the early part of last century, has lost much of its ancient appearance; it is however remarkable for being one of the largest edifices in the kingdom. The interior contains nothing deserving of particular observation.

The only vestige remaining of the other ancient religious edifices which Rye formerly contained, is part of the Chapel, with Gothic windows, of the monastery of the Friars’ Hermits of St. Augustine, now occupied as a store-house.

The town of Rye consists of several streets, very irregularly built; the houses, which amount to upwards of 400, have, in general, a very ancient appearance. The number of its inhabitants far exceeds the

enumeration made in 1801, when they were stated at 2187; they are composed of presbyterians, quakers, baptists, and methodists. In the lower street is a free Grammar-School, which was erected in the year 1636 by Thomas Peacock, gent. One of the jurats, and endowed with the sum of 35*l.* Annually. There is also another free-school, for the education of poor children, founded by a Mr. Saunders. In the principal street, nearly in the centre of the town, is a handsome Market-Place and Public Hall.

The trade of Rye consists chiefly in hops, wool, and timber; besides, during the season, the herring and mackerel fisheries enable many poor families to maintain themselves. Vast quantities of lime is burned near the town, from chalk brought from the cliffs at East Bourne. The market days are held every Wednesday and Friday, besides two fairs annually, on Whit Monday and the 10<sup>th</sup> of August.

Since peace has been concluded with France, packets sail twice a week from Rye to Boulogne.



**Frederick W. L. Stockdale** (1786–1858) was a printmaker; painter/draughtsman and writer active in the early Nineteenth Century. This is the entirety of the Rye section of his *Concise Historical & Topographical Sketch of Hastings, Winchelsea, & Rye* published in 1817, not long after the end of the Napoleonic wars — hence the resumption of packets to Boulogne was news. The text is extracted from the copy in [archive.org](https://archive.org).