

THE CHAPELS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY  
AND ST. JOHN  
AT HIGH LEGH, CHESHIRE  
WITH SOME ACCOUNT OF  
THE CORNWALL-LEGH AND EGERTON LEIGH  
FAMILIES

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THE township of High Legh, situated five miles north-west from Knutsford and the same distance south-west of Altrincham, is a scattered village in a pleasant and well wooded countryside on the busy high road from Warrington to Knutsford. Here the ancient family of Legh had its origin, and by the twelfth century had divided itself into two distinct branches, each possessing its own manorial hall, and later its own chapel. Consequently, disentangling the High Legh history over a period of nine centuries is not easy, and the late Mr. Henry Cornwall Legh, who died in 1934, spent many years exploring the Legh and other muniment rooms, in his researches to augment the valuable work of Thomas Helsby's 1882 revised edition of Dr. George Ormerod's monumental history of the county. High Legh and the Legh family in this work were given very careful study by these antiquaries, and Sir Peter Leicester of nearby Nether Tabley writing his *Historical Antiquities* in the middle seventeenth century had found the problem no less difficult. The present owner of High Legh, Mr. C. L. S. Cornwall-Legh, D.L., J.P., C.C., who inherited the estate in 1934, has kindly placed the whole of his father's notes and the contents of the important muniment room at High Legh at the writer's disposal, and almost all the following material is derived from researches undertaken by the late Mr. Henry Cornwall Legh. As a record of unbroken ownership and occupation of the property from which the family took its name it is remarkable, bearing comparison with any in the land. Mr. Sydney Cornwall Legh, who is the actual head of the family, is a bachelor living in retirement at an advanced age, and is the direct male heir of "Eward de Lega", from whom he is the twenty-fifth in descent. Upon his succession in tail male in 1926, however, he immediately handed over the High Legh Estates to the heir general, his cousin, the late Mr. Henry Cornwall Legh, whose mother, Gertrude Mary Cornwall Legh, married Charles Walker,<sup>(1)</sup> provided that, as is customary in such cases, he took the name in

<sup>(1)</sup> Charles Walker, Barrister-at-Law, Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, son of G. J. A. Walker, D.L., J.P., of Norton, Worcestershire.

lieu of Walker. It is also pertinent to observe that Mr. Sydney Cornwall Legh is the last representative in the male line of any of the Leghs emanating from High Legh, whether they spell their names Legh or Leigh, or derive from East Hall or West Hall.

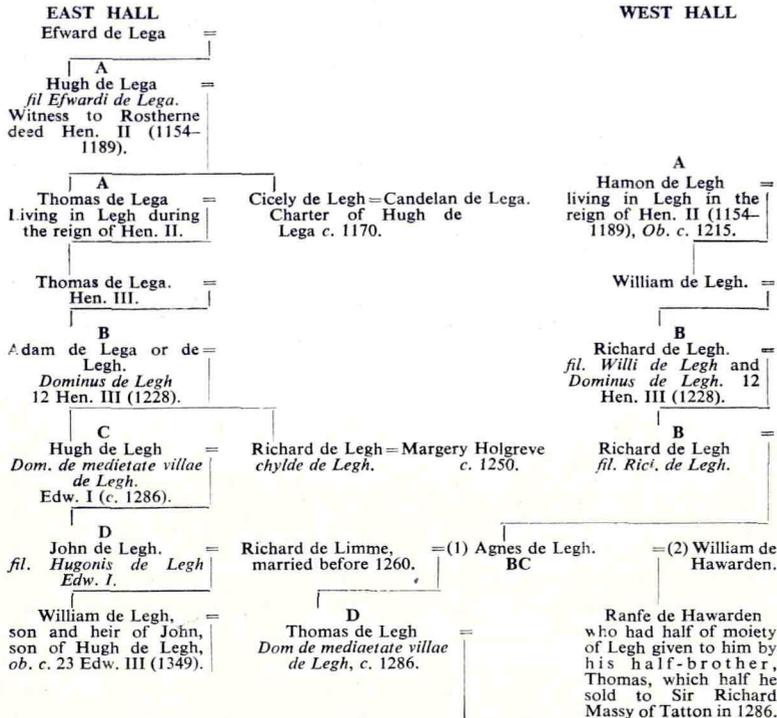
As the story of the Legh families and their chapels is complex and involved, it is advisable at the outset of the following history briefly to preface the account by stating that the Cornwall Leghs were seated at East Hall and the Egerton Leighs at West Hall, which houses are situated close to each other in High Legh. "East Hall" and "West Hall" were only local names used for differentiation purposes, and in the early pedigrees "East Hall" never once appeared in any of that family's deeds. "High Legh Hall" was used from the building of the present Georgian mansion in 1782. To avoid confusion in this account, however, "East Hall" and "West Hall" are retained throughout.

In 1912 the Leighs of West Hall sold their interests to the Leghs of East Hall. East Hall, in its fine park of 180 acres, served as the sole "Capital" house until 1939, when the house and the park were commandeered by the War Office to serve as a military camp and training centre. The suitability of the property as a military camp would unfortunately appear to suggest the likelihood of it being acquired permanently by the War Office. Mr. Cornwall Legh who still lives on the estate retains, however, full control and ownership of the East Hall Chapel which is situated within the Hall grounds, and permission to view it is readily given if application is made in writing to the agent at the Estate Office, High Legh, Knutsford.

In all the oldest pedigrees of East Hall, the Leghs of West Hall are entered side by side as though they came from a common ancestor. In each case Hamon, the originator of the West Hall family, appears as contemporary to Thomas I of East Hall, who was two generations later than Edward. There is little doubt that Hamon of West Hall is one and the same person as Hamon Venables, a great grandson of Gilbert Venables, Baron of Kinderton, who assisted William of Normandy at the Conquest. In fact this is generally accepted as proven. Study of the Legh of West Hall and Venables pedigrees, in the latter of which Hamon is shown as the second son of his father, suggests that he must have been born somewhere about the year 1135. One of the younger brothers was witness to a deed about 1156, while the elder survived until 1228. Dr. Ormerod<sup>(1)</sup> mentions that Hamon was living in Legh about Henry II's time, and as he died during the Justiceship of Philip Orreby (1209-1228), a birth about 1135 is in keeping with these dates. It also seems in keeping with Hamon's earlier descendants, for Agnes Legh of West Hall, four generations later than Hamon, can hardly have been born later than 1240 to have borne sons to two husbands, and to have had the son of the second marriage already of age in 1286 when he disposed of half of the moiety of

<sup>(1)</sup> G. Ormerod, *History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*, 2nd ed. (1882), Vol. p. 451.

Legh which he had previously received from his half-brother of West Hall. To date Hamon's birth as 1135 works out at an average of twenty-six years to a generation, much what one would expect for the times under consideration. The average cannot be altered materially, without getting into difficulties, either over the longevity of Hamon's elder brother, or the date of Agnes's birth.<sup>(1)</sup>



Similarly, in the family of East Hall, Adam Legh, "*Dominus de Legh*" circa 1228, appeared about 1230 as one of the witnesses to a deed in connection with a land transaction in the neighbouring township of Mere, and in 1245 or thereabouts he transferred property in Legh, "with the consent of my heir", to his younger son, Richard. Assuming Richard was of age at the time, and he was married within a few years afterwards, Adam, the father of a son older than Richard, could not have been born later than the year 1200. He was entered in the pedigree as a contemporary of Richard I of West Hall, a grandfather of Agnes Legh. On the same working basis of twenty-six years for a generation, Eward's approximate date of birth can be calculated as 1095, a date which would

<sup>(1)</sup> Agnes must have been married to her first husband before 1260, as Adam Legh was one of the witnesses to the marriage settlement mentioned by Sir Peter Leicester in his *Historical Antiquities*, and, according to Earwaker's Manuscript History of the Legh Family, dated 1894, and preserved in the Legh muniment room, Adam died in or about 1260. Further, the son of this first marriage of Agnes was "Lord of the Mediety of Legh" as early as 1286.

seem to accord more or less with the early pedigree, in which Hamon is shown as two generations later than Eward. Again, those members of the East Hall family whose names on the Chart are marked with the letters B, C, or D are found as parties in, or witnesses to deeds with the members of the West Hall family similarly marked. Thus, Adam appears with no less than three generations of West Hall, and his son Hugh with two. Earlier, Hugh, son of Eward (marked A) was a contemporary of Hamon of West Hall, in so far as he was one of the witnesses with William Legh, presumably a brother, to a Rostherne deed in the reign of Henry II.<sup>(1)</sup>

For how long Eward was *de Lega*, whether by birth or by subsequent residence, there is nothing to show, but that he was *de Lega* is confirmed by a charter of his son Hugh, an abstract of which appears on one of the family pedigrees, and in the records of the College of Arms.

*Universis Sanctae matris ecclesiae filiis clericis et laicis tam presentibus quam futuris Hugo filius Ewardi de Lega in xpo (Christo) salutem. Sciatis me dedisse Candelano filio Candelani de Lega in libero maritagio cum filia mea Cicilia de terra mea scilicet Suthebro, et totam partem meam in Suertun cum omnibus pertinentiis suis. Tenenda etc.*

*Testibus. Ada filia [sic] Ric.,*

*Ada de Eshestu*

*Gilberto de Lym'a*

*Willelmo de Lega, etc.*<sup>(2)</sup>

Attached to this deed was a seal, with a *lion rampant sinister* circumscribed *Sigillum Hugonis filli Ewardi de Lega*. Unfortunately the original document is no longer in the Legh muniment room, but that it existed at the time of the Herald's Visitation of Chester in 1580 is vouched for by the College of Arms, which records it as being *ex cartis Thomae Legh de High Legh*. Without the original it is difficult to fix its date with any degree of certainty, but the position of the donor in the pedigree suggests that it was probably executed somewhere about 1170. Such a date would seemingly fit in also with the only two witnesses of whom anything is known, namely with Gilbert of Lymme and William *de Lega*. Care must be taken not to confuse the latter with William Legh of West Hall, for *de Lega* was never attached to any contemporary member of that family. This William of the charter was therefore no doubt connected with the East Hall people, and though he is not found in any of the deeds, he appears curiously enough, in the pedigree given by Ormerod as a brother to this Hugh Legh, and that is probably his correct identity. It is this same William who is given as one of the witnesses to the Rostherne deed already referred to

<sup>(1)</sup> These facts, which go to confirm the approximate dates for the births of Eward and Hamon as 1095 and 1135, are derived either from the High Legh deeds themselves, or from abstracts quoted by Sir Peter Leicester, *Historical Antiquities*.

<sup>(2)</sup> "To all the sons, clerical and lay, of the Holy Mother Church, present and future, Hugh son of Eward of Legh, greeting in Christ. Know ye that I have given to Candelane son of Candelane of Legh in free marriage with my daughter Cicilia of my lands, to wit Suthebro and all my part in Suertun with all their appurtenances. To hold, etc. Witnesses:—Adam son of Richard, Adam of Eshestu[n], Gilbert of Lymme, William of Legh." The unusual name "Candelan" has thrown some doubt on the authenticity of this charter.

under the joint entry of "Hugone et Willielmo de Lega". Presumably representatives of different houses would not be so bracketed. As regards the other witness, Gilbert Lymme, Sir Peter Leicester stated that he was living in the reign of King John, which fact is confirmed by a deed copied in the *Swinehead Chartulary*. Gilbert was one of the witnesses to the deed made by Roger, Constable of Cheshire, somewhere between the years 1190 and 1211 when the said Roger died, but what the age of Gilbert was at the time is not known. Leicester made this Gilbert the grandfather of Richard Lymme who married Agnes Legh *circa* 1260, but the family pedigrees enter Roger Lymme as the grandfather, and there is another deed in the *Chartulary* which refers to a marriage settlement made by this said Roger, which definitely proves him to be the grandfather and not Gilbert. It is certain that Gilbert Lymme was a generation further back, and old enough to be a witness to the Hugh Charter about 1170.

Although it has been established that Eward was himself *de Lega* and that he must have been born about the year 1095, the problem still remains whether he was of Norman or Saxon origin. The earliest record we have of the village of Legh is in the *Domesday Survey* of 1087, and for the sake of reference an abstract from the same is here given, together with similar abstracts from the accounts of other villages in the vicinity:—

"Lege". The same Gilbert holds Lege. Ulviet and Dot held it for ii manors and were free men."

"Lymm".i. The same Gilbert holds Lime. Ulviet held it and was free."

"Mere". The same Gilbert holds Mere. Ulviet held it and was a free man."

"Rostherne". The same Gilbert holds Rodestorne. Ulviet held it."

"Lymm".ii. The same Osbern holds Lime. Edward held it and was a free man . . . Edward holds it of him."

If Eward Legh were of Saxon origin he would presumably have been a son or a descendant of either the Ulviet or Dot mentioned in the *Survey*, who were the overlords of the village at the time of the Conquest. In a few instances the Saxon owners were allowed to stay on in the possession of their estates under the new lord appointed by William I, but such cases were distinctly exceptional. So far as Legh is concerned no exception was apparently made. Ormerod writes, "Whatever may have been said from tradition or otherwise to the contrary, it is incontrovertibly clear from *Domesday* that the Saxon Lords of High Legh were ejected at the Conquest, and that a new Lord was then introduced, Gilbert de Venables, Baron of Kinderton, from whose grants or those of his descendants, all subsequent proprietors must have derived their possession."<sup>(1)</sup> On the face of it Ormerod is right, and though it is possible that the compilers of *Domesday Book* made an error in their account of the village by omitting words "Ulviet (or Dot) holds it of him", there is every reason to believe that what is implied is correct, for it seems to be a fact that wherever Gilbert Venables was granted lands he

<sup>(1)</sup> G. Ormerod, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 454.

invariably turned out the Saxons. Besides Legh he was given possessions at Lymm, Mere, Rostherne, Wincham, Nether Peover, Kinderton and elsewhere, and in no single instance is there a record of his having allowed the former owner to remain. Osbern Fitz-Tezzon, in the neighbouring moiety of Lymm, left his Saxon overlord in possession, but that fact is plainly stated in *Domesday*. In the circumstances, it must be assumed that Ulviet and Dot were ejected, and with them goes the probability of a Saxon lineage for Eward, unless, indeed, he was a Saxon who became allied to the Venables family by subsequent marriage or service.

The East Hall family tradition is that the originator of the Leghs was in the retinue of the Duke of Normandy—in other words, the inevitable “came over with the Conqueror” tradition—and that both the East Hall and West Hall people emanated from a common ancestor. If Eward were descended from Gilbert Venables the tradition would be true, and as Ormerod conjectures, “general probability would deduce both the original mesne proprietors of High Legh from the family of their paramount Lords, and would consequently derive Eward from the baronial house of Kinderton.”<sup>(1)</sup> As already noticed, Hamon of the West Hall has been practically proved to be so descended, and about 1188 Hamon’s elder brother, the 4th Baron of Kinderton, used as his seal a *lion rampant sinister*, which is exactly the same seal as that recorded for Hugh Legh on his charter of c. 1170. This point should be kept in mind in enquiries concerning the origin of Eward, though too much should not be laid upon it, for it must be admitted that the High Legh Deeds (there are some 275 of them dealing with the actual descendants of the East Hall alone) contain no other record of armorial bearings being used for the sealing of documents until many years later. It is true that most of the deeds have their seals missing, but such as have survived are a mixed lot, not armorial, and doubtless in many cases merely seals belonging to attorneys or trustees, anything that might be available at the time of signing. There are a few instances in which this is not so, in which the seal is circumscribed by the name of the Legh concerned, but in each case the seal consists of a star or a *fleur de lis*, and not the *lion rampant*.<sup>(2)</sup>

These remarks do not rule out the lion as the family badge of the day. They merely show that caution must be exercised in dealing with the Hugh charter. That the East Hall people had been using the *lion rampant (dexter)* as their coat-of-arms for a considerable period prior to its confirmation at the first Heralds’ Visitation of Cheshire in 1566 is established by the following evidences:<sup>(3)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 457.

<sup>(2)</sup> Adam, great grandson of Hugh, had for his seal a star of eight points surrounded by his name. Two generations later John and his sister Alice used a *fleur de lis*, likewise with their names circumscribed, while John of the next descent bore a squirrel. This was in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and the facts lead one to infer that, if arms existed at the time, they were not generally used for documentary sealing, each generation instead choosing its own peculiar device for the purpose.

<sup>(3)</sup> The *lion rampant* is always *dexter*, i.e. facing to its right (as the Legh lion is today), unless *sinister* (to its left), or *regardant* (looking backward) is specifically added.

- (1) In the High Legh MSS., Vol. II, appears this note by George Legh written in 1779:—"I find in an Ancient Manuscript book<sup>(1)</sup> an Alphabetical list of the Familys of Cheshire with their Arms over agst them. And it is there wrote as follows, viz<sup>t</sup>. The books out of which these Blazons following were taken was bought of Widow of March King of Arms by "Garter Roy D'Armes del Anglois A°. 6.H.7" which was in 1491, and amongst other Familys the Leghs of High Legh are names thus—

"Legh of Legh of the East Hall.

A. a Lyon Ramp<sup>t</sup>.G.

Legh Richd of the Westhall. G. <sup>(2)</sup>

pale Fusilee A. .... ."

The booke above was in the hands of Robt Cooke alias Clarencieux 1583."

- (2) In 1563 Thomas Legh of High Legh, East Hall, affixed his seal of a *lion rampant*, with his initials T.L. on either side of it, to deed number 279 in the High Legh collection.
- (3) Randle Homes in 1575 (Harleian MSS. 2151) mentions the coat of "Legh of Easthall" as existing, along with several others, in the windows of Rostherne Church in the Legh Chapel, and Bishop Gastrell (1720) records that under one of these coats was written "An.1300".<sup>(3)</sup>
- (4) Randle Holmes also mentions a *lion rampant regardant* as cut on an ancient stone in the same chapel.

Ormerod attributes this latter coat to the Leghs of East Hall, and conjectures that the *lion regardant* was first variation from the *lion rampant sinister* in the Legh arms, and if the stone cutters of the day were as casual as their contemporaries were in their spelling, one need not be surprised at anything. Be that as it may, sufficient has been written to show that the Leghs had been using the lion well before the Cheshire Visitation, and it is obvious that if the family badge does not actually date from the days of Hugh of the Charter, it was this seal which was the originator of the arms as they existed in the fifteenth century.

The question is, was it borne by Kinderton and Legh as a badge of family relationship? It is impossible to say. It might have been merely a convenient device which happened to be adopted by both families at the time, much in the same way as the *fleur-de-lis* at a later generation. In support of this, there is the fact that the lion was not borne by other Kinderton barons, nor was it carried on by

<sup>(1)</sup> *Glover's Visitation County of Chester, 1566-1580*, in MS. in the High Legh library. How the Cornwall-Leghs came to be in possession of this very interesting and valuable book is not known. The College of Arms examined it very fully in 1932.

<sup>(2)</sup> There is nothing to show how many years the book was in existence before 1491.

<sup>(3)</sup> Gastrell does not mean to imply by this that 1300 was written under the Legh coat itself. The Bishop does not state under which coat. The point is that, as this date appeared under the coat in the same window, there is no reason to assume that the Legh Arms were only put into the window subsequent to the Visitation of 1566; in fact, such a supposition would be highly unlikely, seeing that the family had not been using the Rostherne Chapel for probably a long time before that date.

the immediate descendants of Hugh Legh, judging from the evidence in the High Legh deeds, and though this in itself does not prove that the seal was not the peculiar badge of a generation, a badge borne by one because of the other, its use is not of the same value as an established coat-of-arms would have been. The likelihood of a Kinderton descent for Hugh, therefore, rests more upon general probabilities in conjunction with the seal, rather than upon the evidence of the seal itself.

It is interesting to observe that the early names of the Legh family, Hugh and William, were also Kinderton names at the time. Eward Legh obtained his grant of the moiety of Legh from the Kinderton family by general fealty only, and not by service. This is evidenced by the *Inquisitions Post Mortem* taken in 1591 after the death of Thomas Legh, in which it is stated that the Manors of Legh and Northwood *etc.* were held under the Baron of Kinderton *per Fidelitatem tantum*. It is certain too, that the East Hall family was the original Legh of Legh, quite apart from any consideration as to the earlier date assigned to Eward over Hamon in all the family pedigrees. If, therefore, the East Hall family was the first in the village, it might be asked whether it is probable that a Kinderton relative would be put into half the village of West Hall c. 1155, while the other had been previously granted to someone outside the family. More than likely it was originally given to one son, and by him subsequently divided. Hamon of West Hall was one of the younger sons of the third Baron of Kinderton, and if Eward of East Hall is to be grafted on to the Kinderton tree, he must have been a generation further back. The approximate date of his birth would fit in well enough with such a supposition. Ormerod states that the name of the second Baron "does not appear", and there is no record of any of his children other than Gilbert, who succeeded to Kinderton and became the third Baron. It seems unlikely that but one child should have been born to both the first and second barons, and there is plenty of room, therefore, for Eward of the East Hall as a younger son or grandson of the original Baron. It is possible that he came from the second Baron who, inheriting his father's possessions, left Legh between his two sons, the third Baron and Eward, resulting in the third Baron living at Kinderton and the younger brother at Legh. This would not only account for Eward being resident in Legh before his brother's younger son, Hamon, who obtained the West Hall moiety of the village from his father probably upon his coming of age, but would also explain the two families using the same seal (i.e. that of the Hugh Charter) in the next generation.<sup>(1)</sup> Whether this supposition be correct—and it is a supposition only—will never be known, but some such relationship must have existed if Eward is to be deducted, as Ormerod surmises, from the baronial house of Kinder-

<sup>(1)</sup> As already mentioned the *lion rampant sinister* was borne by the 4th Baron of Kinderton, as well as by Hugh Legh. If the above supposition about Eward's place in the pedigree of Venables be correct, the 4th Baron and Hugh Legh would be first cousins.

ton, and if he is not to be a descendant only by virtue of marriage with one of the Venables daughters. In the latter case, Eward may have been either Norman or Saxon. His name is Saxon, certainly, but too much cannot be made of this as both races speedily intermarried after the Conquest, and "Eward" may as well have derived from a Saxon mother as from a Saxon father. In all the exhaustive enquiries undertaken by the late Charles Henry Cornwall Legh, he came upon but one established fact, and that is that Eward was a grantee of the Baron of Kinderton, but whether by descent, by marriage, or by purchase there is no vestige of evidence to show. With the record of *Domesday*, the family tradition, the seal, the Kinderton descent of Hamon, and the prior residence in Legh over the West Hall, the chances appear to be more in favour of a Kinder-ton origin for Eward than of a Saxon one. "Eward de Lega", whether Norman or Saxon, was obviously a person of position in his day, and if the Legh family of East Hall is particularly desirous of a descent from the great Gilbert Venables of Kinderton, brother of Stephen, Earl of Blois, they get it many times over in the female line by subsequent intermarriages.

Whatever the actual date of the division of the township of Legh between the two families which assumed the local name, the duality did not last long, for somewhere about the middle of the reign of Edward I, Thomas de Legh of the West Hall gave one half of his moiety to his half-brother, Ralph de Hawarden, who sold it to Sir Richard Massey of Tatton, from whom it descended with that estate to the present Lord Egerton. Dr. Ormerod gives the actual date of this transfer as 1286, and from then onwards, until the year 1912, the township was owned by three lords of the manor, each the representative of the same family throughout, the Legh of East Hall owning something like half the entire area, the other half falling between the Legh of West Hall and the owner of Tatton—truly a remarkable partnership. The proportions held by each family have been altered from time to time, of course, by subsequent purchases, sales and exchanges. In 1877 the New Ordnance Survey, more carefully and accurately done than its predecessors, made the township some 4,521 acres, divided at that date as follows:—

Lekh of East Hall	..	..	..	2,675	acres
Lekh of West Hall	..	..	..	1,135	„
Lord Egerton of Tatton	..	..	..	583	„
Road, School and Church plots, etc.				128	„
				<hr/>	
				4,521	„

That is much about the proportions in which the village was held in 1912 when the triple partnership came to an end.

This long alliance, and the numerous sales and exchanges that were periodically effected between the three lords resulted not unnaturally in a great intermingling of the respective estates, and by

the nineteenth century the whole village had become like a chess-board, the various fields and farms being mixed up in a most confusing way. The state of affairs existing in 1879 is amusingly conveyed in the following lines from the pen of the Rev. A. J. Richardson, Incumbent of the Village Church of St. John at the time:—

'Tis an odd state of things that a stranger would see,  
 If he came on a visit perchance to High Leigh;  
 To his mind it would cause great confusion and bother,  
 To find things so mix'd up the one with the other;  
 Two Establishments separate, two Halls and two Squires,  
 Two parsons, two chapels, two bells and two choirs!  
 Whilst the Magnates themselves couldn't fairly agree,  
 As to spelling correctly the name of "High Leigh",  
 One stoutly insisting on "i" with the "e",  
 The other on nothing between "e" and "g";  
 On map and on sign-post you'd meet with the "i"  
 P.O.O.'s were without it, and folks wondered why;  
 Then the agent found out, when he took the big ledger down,  
 The estates all mix'd up with the farms of Lord Egerton  
 And directions for letters and parcels were wrapp'd in  
 A regular muddle 'twixt Colonel and Captain;  
 For if to "The Hall" they should chance be address'd  
 It was doubtful if meant for the "East" or the "West"  
 But for rights of precedence 'twas doubtful which had 'em,  
 For neither could trace up much further than Adam!  
 So what you're about be particular, please,  
 For Cheshire is full of cats, cheeses and Leighs,  
 Leghs of Lyme, Leghs of Adlington, everything "Legh",  
 From the innermost bounds to the banks of the Dee;  
 And from dropping a letter what comes there's no telling,  
 So you'd best mind your "i" and look after your spelling.

As a result of this confusion, an exchange of lands between the three lords was effected in 1887. The marvel is that it was not thought of before. Lord Egerton received tenements on the outskirts of High Legh and in neighbouring villages in exchange for his holdings more in the centre of the township. This exchange did not materially affect the acreage in possession of the respective owners, Lord Egerton still being left with approximately 500 acres, but it consolidated the East Hall and West Hall properties and made things less complicated for the ensuing partnership.

In 1912 a further and more important change took place, for the triple partnership in which the two families of Legh had participated for almost seven hundred and sixty years came to an end when the Leighs of West Hall sold their interests to the Leghs of East Hall. This resulted in the remaining two lords holding the township between them, the Legh of East Hall owning something approaching seven-eighths of the entire area, a proportion which continued until 1919 when Colonel Hubert Cornwall Legh disposed of some of his outlying farms mainly to sitting tenants. It was reserved to 1932, however, for the most revolutionary change of all. In that year, unheralded and almost unnoticed, Lord Egerton of Tatton sold his share in the village to a syndicate which immediately converted it

into smallholdings and building plots, and for the first time since the days of the Conquest, High Legh was possessed by one lord of the manor, the Legh of East Hall, who today remains in possession of very much the same acreage as his family originally started with in the early twelfth century, namely half the township.

Differentiation between East Hall and West Hall does not appear in any of the High Legh deeds dealing with the family from about the year 1230. It is either "Legh of Legh" or "Legh of High Legh".<sup>(1)</sup> It is regrettable that it is so, for the omission of such a distinguishing mark must have given genealogists many a headache in the past, and small wonder is it that properties originally belonging to the East Hall should have been credited to the West Hall family, as has undoubtedly happened on one or two occasions, and probably vice versa. Imagine the difficulty of a deed<sup>(2)</sup> signed by Nicholas Legh of High Legh (East Hall) witnessed by Thomas Legh of High Legh (West Hall). The first actual reference in the High Legh Deeds to the Manor House itself is in the year 1319 (*Swinehead Chartularies*) when "Hugh of the Hall" appears. In 1528 "Robert Legh of High Legh Esqre" occurs in the transference of lands "within the town of Legh"<sup>(3)</sup> so that up to this time some distinction or other was recognized between "Legh" and "High Legh". By 1535, however, such a distinction had disappeared, for a document of that date refers only to lands in *High Legh*, and in none of the numerous transfers of property since that year does "Legh" occur by itself; it is always "High Legh". From this it may be assumed that the prefix originated through a desire of the lords to differentiate their own capital messuages from the rest of the village in general, and that it gradually extended to the whole township. As late as 1673 Sir Peter Leicester refers to "Legh *vulgo* High Legh".

The two halls in High Legh were situated close together, practically back to back, according to ancient plans and drawings, and were separated by a wall which was "elevated" at some time or other to about fifteen feet in height. In 1581, the Old Hall was pulled down by Thomas Legh and an Elizabethan building of stone erected in its stead. Whether the former was the original Saxon or Norman house, there is nothing to show. Of the new building (1581) Ormerod<sup>(4)</sup> states that it "exhibited a fine specimen of domestic architecture, finished with gables, projecting bay windows, heavy roofs, battlements, and groups of tall ornamental chimneys. In the centre, over the entrance, was a large and massy turret of four storeys, embattled, from the summit of which rose two small spires." This Hall, together with the chapel, was engraved by W. Watts in 1784, from a painting performed in 1781 by the local artist of the day, Samuel Stringer of Knutsford, and it is depicted upon one of the family Bibles, both of which are still in the family pos-

<sup>(1)</sup> The third lord lived at Tatton Park, Knutsford.

<sup>(2)</sup> High Legh Deed No. 142 of 1488.

<sup>(3)</sup> Another deed of this year makes mention of "Richard Legh of High Legh, Squyer (of the West Hall)" and "Robert Legh of High Legh Squyer (of the East Hall)."

<sup>(4)</sup> G. Ormerod, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 460.

session. It is fortunate that Stringer's picture was painted in 1781 for in the very next year the Hall was pulled down by Henry Cornwall Legh, and replaced by the present Georgian building, making so far as is known the third hall on the same spot.<sup>(1)</sup> As to why the Elizabethan structure should have been demolished in so comparatively short a time there is no actual evidence. The family documents show that considerable building was going on at that date, but throw no other light, and Ormerod merely records the fact of the replacement. It is probable that a fire had something to do with it, for on two old inlaid cabinets which remain to this day, are labels bearing the words, "This was in the old house that was burnt down". The fire, however, can hardly have been more than partial, probably confined to a wing to justify the words "burnt down", or else the owner was extraordinarily fortunate in saving his valuables, for most of the family portraits in being today predate 1782<sup>(2)</sup>, as do many of the library books which, in a number of cases, bear Legh book plates, the peculiar badges of different heads of the family in the preceding century. A good deal of the silver and no little furniture still in use are also prior to this date.<sup>(3)</sup>

It would seem, therefore, that the fire was more the occasion than the actual cause of the new hall, and it is to be noted that during the eighteenth century there was a great wave of building throughout the country. Most of the large manorial houses in the neighbourhood of Knutsford date from that period. The new hall, however, upset the lay-out of the grounds owing to the fact that it was re-erected about fifty yards to the east of the Elizabethan hall, i.e. on the other side of the drive to the stables. In 1791, Repton, the celebrated landscape artist of the day, was called in to advise. His report and sketches are interesting reading. He particularly bemoaned the narrowness of the park owing to the close proximity of the turnpike road, and to the way it curved in towards the house at the corner near the private chapel, and it is doubtless due to the suggestions contained in the report that it was shortly afterwards diverted. Originally, the main road from Warrington to Knutsford entered High Legh at a square where were situated the village cross, the Red Lion inn,<sup>(4)</sup> the smithy and the "Misses Legh's School". Continuing thence it passed between the private chapel and the inn, deflecting from the house immediately afterwards.<sup>(5)</sup> In the year 1794 the road was diverted at the square to the other side of the inn, which was pulled down, and the intervening grounds were enclosed within the park. The cellars of the "Red Lion" were turned into

<sup>(1)</sup> Some of the rainpipes bear the initials H.C.L. and the date 1782.

<sup>(2)</sup> They number sixty-eight altogether, more than half painted before the fire. In this connection it may be noted that portraits of two generations are missing (i.e. between the oldest portrait and that of Henry the Cavalier), and it may be that these existed once upon a time and were destroyed. Richard Legh, the son of the said Henry, desired in his will that his ancestral portraits should be treated as heirlooms, and this rather lends colour to the idea that more than the two which still exist were in being in his day.

<sup>(3)</sup> Some of the furniture and books are definitely Cornwall property from Burford, Shropshire. Burford was sold c. 1725.

<sup>(4)</sup> Called so after the family coat-of-arms.

<sup>(5)</sup> Part of the present rose garden lies on the trace.

a rock garden, and the inn pump which still stands on its original site is known today as the "chapel pump", and supplied drinking water to the hall. The main drive was thereupon brought down to the further side of the spot where the inn had previously stood, and a lodge was erected there. So things remained until 1854 or thereabouts, when a change on a much greater scale took place, a change which not only added considerably to the park of East Hall, and enlarged slightly the grounds of West Hall, but materially affected the township in general. The main Warrington-Knutsford road was again diverted, and on this occasion the Arley-Lymm Road was included in the scheme. A fresh trace was struck for the former from a spot some distance away from East Hall, near the "Oak-Tree Cottage", to a point about half-way up the park beyond the Hall (i.e. to the spot where the present park wall ends), while the Lymm road was straightened out from a sharp bend near the present smithy<sup>(1)</sup>. As a result of these alterations the village cross became enclosed within the West Hall grounds where it still remains on the original site, the old smithy was done away with, the Misses Legh's Private School became enclosed and is now the chaplain's house, enlarged in 1862, and the village school on the Arley Road was turned into the present lodge at the entrance to the drive.<sup>(2)</sup> The old turnpike road, now known as Pheasant Walk, with a good deal of ground on the farther side of it, automatically fell within the park, and to replace the village school, a new building was erected by the three lords of the manor, in the usual proportion of half to the owner of East Hall and a quarter each to the proprietors of West Hall and Tatton. In 1867 the Bear's Paw Inn was closed by Lord Egerton and turned into a farm house, and until relicensed in 1948 there was no public house within the confines of High Legh, though generally speaking there were "two parsons, two Chapels, two bells and two choirs."

Most of the lords of East Hall have served their country in some form or other from the Escheators Hugh Legh of 1397 and Ralph of 1459, through the "aulnagership"<sup>(3)</sup> of Thomas (1539) to a line of high sheriffs, magistrates and deputy lieutenants. Several of the younger sons lost their lives in fighting for their country, while Henry Legh of High Legh, "Colonel of the Horse", was a strong Royalist, serving as will be seen later in the sieges of Chester and Worcester. Twice the family came within an ace of dying out with an only son to carry on the inheritance, but generally speaking no lack of offspring was apparent in the East Hall Leghs and their

<sup>(1)</sup> Traces of the old roads can still be seen:—the lane leading past "Millfield" house to "Westfield", and land alongside St. John's Church which continues for a little distance into the present West Hall garden.

<sup>(2)</sup> This was erected by "the inhabitants of High Legh", 1717.

<sup>(3)</sup> "Aulnagership" of Thomas Legh. The word is derived from *alnager* or *ulnager*, an ell-measurer. He was a sworn officer whose business formerly was to inspect the assize of woollen cloth, but later he became a collector of a subsidy granted to the king. In *Chester Archaeological Journal*, New Series, Vol. I, in a paper on the ancient charters and deeds at High Legh, it is stated that Thomas Legh, of High Legh, esquire, was appointed to the office of "Aulnager" in the county palatine of Lancaster, in succession to his brother-in-law, William Trafford, of the Garrett, esquire, and that there were three deeds relating to the office between 1539 and 1572.

collaterals, the warrior Henry, 1611-84, being credited with no less than seven sons and nine daughters by his only wife.

Unlike the Leghs of West Hall, no houses of distinction have emanated from East Hall, and the few which did branch therefrom, the Leghs of Northwood, the Leghs of Mere and the Leghs of Barton near Manchester,<sup>(1)</sup> have clung more or less to the immediate neighbourhood. Curiously, with the exception of the Leghs of Northwood, now merged in the parent house owing to Thomas Legh of Northwood having recovered East Hall and the High Legh Estates under tail male, when the elder line ended with three co-heiresses c. 1510, all these families are extinct. It is via the Northwood Leghs, through the second son of John Legh of East Hall, who was living in 1307, that the Leghs of today descend.

Numerous as were the progeny of East Hall, they were not so numerous as the Leighs of West Hall from whom descended, according to Ormerod, no less than nineteen different houses, the Leghs of Lyme and Adlington and the Leighs of Stoneleigh being the most distinguished today. They all descended through the female line, however, and had it not been for Agnes Legh, the sole heiress of her father Richard, the West Hall family would have died out in the thirteenth century. This lady, however, took to herself three husbands, and bore a son by each, two of them taking the name of their mother's village. It is from one or other of these sons that the West Hall family, and all those other Leghs or Leighs, which branched therefrom during the succeeding centuries, descend today.

It is hardly to be expected that two houses could live side by side for so many generations as did the lords of East Hall and West Hall, without coming into conflict at some time or other, and though generally speaking they appear to have lived on friendly terms with each other, there existed a very strained relationship between them during the sixteenth century. It began with the succession of Thomas Legh of Northwood to the East Hall Estates, when, as will be seen later, the West Hall squire of the day did everything in his power to prevent his obtaining his inheritance, and the law and the Church had to be called upon to intervene.<sup>(2)</sup> It was still going on in 1528 when "Robert Legh of High Legh, squyer", the son of the said Thomas of Northwood, and "Richard Legh of Hekh Legh, Squyer" of the West Hall had to resort to arbitration over "a variance had between them" concerning a piece of land in the township. In the following year it was necessary for a bond to be entered into to enforce the respective parties abiding by the award

<sup>(1)</sup> The Swineyard property (originally called Swinehead) was purchased by Richard Legh of East Hall at the end of the seventeenth century, while Barton with its Openshaw Estate came to him by will about the same time. There were eleven generations of Leghs at Swineyard, six at Northwood, three at Mere and two at Barton. Swineyard and Northwood branched from the family in the fifteenth century, Mere and Barton in the early seventeenth. Northwood is a hamlet in High Legh itself. Today Northwood Hall is a large farmhouse.

<sup>(2)</sup> There is little doubt but that this hostility on the part of West Hall was due to the belief that the whole of the East Hall property would pass to West Hall, by reason of the fact that one of the East Hall co-heiresses had recently married the West Hall son. The Northwood "interloper" if he succeeded would ruin the whole prospect.

given, and it all culminated in the serious flare up in 1582 over their armorial bearings, which was only settled by an appeal, given against the West Hall, to the Earl Marshall.

These disputes naturally left their mark on both parties,<sup>(1)</sup> and were the cause of various rumours and tales, amongst them the pretty story woven around the great wall, fifteen feet in height, which separated the two establishments. It is pointed out with bated breath as a lasting memorial of bygone feuds, embellished with the information that every time a fresh dispute occurred a further course was added. Needless to say, this is pure fiction. It is true that the wall is tall, but it is equally true that, if inspection be carried further, it will be found that the same height of wall, so far as the original brick structure is concerned, is carried on throughout the gardens, the greater part of which are right away from West Hall and have nothing whatever to do with it. What has probably given rise to the tradition is that the brick structure was "fortified" at some time or other by another stone wall consisting of large blocks, which rise above the original, but it is quite certain that the stone was added after the rebuilding of East Hall in 1782, when the feud was dead and for the most part forgotten. The stones of the Elizabethan Hall had to be disposed of somehow or other,<sup>(2)</sup> and just as the smaller rough stones and corner pieces were used to erect ornamental walls, arches and a rock garden, so part of the main material was used for strengthening and heightening the dividing wall.<sup>(3)</sup>

It was probably as a further result of these troublous times, either directly or indirectly, that the West Hall family, thoroughly disgusted at the turn events had taken both over the 1510 succession and the 1582 squabble over the arms, decided permanently to disassociate themselves from the East Hall people, by putting an "i" into the spelling of their name, and by looking upon the village as being spelt in the same way, a move which was to become the cause of no little trouble and friction in the centuries that were to follow.<sup>(4)</sup> The lords could spell their names as they liked, but when it came to a difference in the spelling of the village, difficulties were bound to arise. One or other of the two spellings appeared on signposts and milestones, until Legh and Leigh became almost as mixed up as the lands of the lords themselves. None knew which was correct—High Legh or High Leigh.

This suited neither lord, for if there were one thing about which

<sup>(1)</sup> Even as late as the second half of the eighteenth century the dispute about the arms was still ranking at East Hall, according to the High Legh letters. The trouble was that, despite the ruling of the Earl Marshall against the claims of West Hall, that family managed some years after to prevail upon the Heralds to grant them the East Hall arms, making a difference only in the field, and George Legh, who died in 1780, was very sarcastic about it.

<sup>(2)</sup> The 1782 building of the present Hall is of brick.

<sup>(3)</sup> It should further be noted that the stones both in this wall and in those of the Chapel buildings are exactly the same, and that the Elizabethan Hall, demolished in 1782 was erected at the same time as the Chapel in 1581. Had the wall been deliberately built as a result of the feud, the height would surely have been kept uniform throughout its whole length. It will be seen that this is not the case, obviously showing that there were not enough stones to go round.

<sup>(4)</sup> The "i" appears for the first time in the West Hall pedigree with Thomas Legh who died in 1670, no date being given of his birth.

each was adamant, it was that his name spelt the same as the village, but with two spellings in use, mistakes were inevitable, resulting in both each blaming the other for the state of confusion which existed. Eventually it became a recognized procedure to spell according to the name of the person addressed. This was a compromise which worked in a way, but it did not establish the proper name of the place, nor did it avoid perpetual pinpricks from inquisitive inquirers. Both families made themselves ridiculous in their inability to agree over so trivial a matter. Trivial though it was, it assumed large proportions owing to the importance attached to it by each and every succeeding generation, and Mr. Richardson was not far out when he wrote "for dropping a letter what comes there's no telling."

Not until the second half of the seventeenth century did a standardized spelling begin to be accepted. The High Legh deeds contain every conceivable variation of spelling for both the village and the family, though the spelling Legh greatly predominates:—Lege, Lega, Legh, Ley, Leye, Leygh, Lee, Leegh, Leigh, and Leighe. The "i" was the last variation round about the sixteenth century, and though, generally speaking, the East Hall people kept clear of it, occasionally they adopted it. There are instances of the same man writing his signature in different ways on different occasions. Thomas, who built the private Chapel in 1581, is commemorated in the stained glass window as "Leigh", though much about the same time he was signing his will as "Leghe". There are documents beginning one way and ending another, and what is to be thought of the will of Catherine Legh of East Hall, which, beginning "Legh", refers to "my cousin Henry Leigh of Leigh", "my cousin Legh of High Legh", "my niece Legh of High Lee", and ends with the signature "K. Leigh"? In such circumstances Leigh would appear to be as correct as any other. But, if reference be made further back, there is no "i" in the Saxon village of "Lege", nor in its Norman translation of "Legh". There is no "i" in any of the original pedigrees of the East Hall and West Hall families, neither is there a single instance of it, either in the name of the village or of the family, in the first one hundred and fifty-nine deeds in the High Legh collection, despite the other variations that exist. It is not until 1568 that the "i" first creeps into the deeds and its appearance thereafter is limited and irregular, and by 1660 had dropped out again altogether. There is no "i" in the spelling of the word throughout Sir Peter Leicester's history of the village, nor on the county map embodied therein in 1673, on which he refers to the village as "Legh, vulgo High Legh". If further proof of the originality of "Legh" be wanted, it is to be found in the two great houses which descended in the fourteenth century from the West Hall family via Norbury Booths, the Leghs of Lyme and the Leghs of Adlington. The East Hall argument has always been that as both families took their name from the village, and the letter "i" appears nowhere in the spelling of that village until Elizabethan

times, Leigh cannot be correct, so that, paraphrasing Mr. Richardson, "You'd best Drop your 'i' and look after your spelling"!

### THE CHAPEL OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

ONE of the oldest buildings in High Legh is the private chapel of East Hall, situated in the park some hundred yards to the west of the Hall. The present chapel was built by Thomas Legh in 1581 and has always been known as "High Legh Chapel". It has never been consecrated, but it was blessed by the Bishop of the diocese, and at some time or other dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. By tradition the chapel has always been associated with the church in Legh mentioned in *Domesday Book*. It is said that that church was in all probability the original chapel of Easthall, and that the present building is on the identical site, thereby implying the existence of a chapel on the spot more or less continuously from the eleventh century. Until the middle of the nineteenth century the chapel lay alongside the Warrington-Knutsford turn-pike road, with its main entrance leading directly into it, and it was only when the road was enclosed within the park that it became separated from it as it is today. *Domesday* mentions that at the time of the survey the vill or township of Legh had a priest and a church—*ibi Presbyter et Ecclesia*, but no record of such a church exists outside the source indicated, and it is possible, indeed probable, that *ecclesia* in the strict sense of the word never existed at all. Sir Peter Leicester reported that there was no trace of it in 1673, and Ormerod frankly disbelieved in it, being inclined to attribute the *Domesday* record to a misunderstanding on the part of the compilers.

One of the Saxon owners of Legh was owner also of the neighbouring village of Mere which runs into Rostherne, of which again he was the owner. At the time of the Conquest the three villages went to Gilbert Venables. It may be that, having the same overlord, the *Domesday* compilers confused the boundaries, as Ormerod surmises, and took the Rostherne Church as being within the confines of Legh. The frequent mention of Rectors of Rostherne as witnesses in the earliest High Legh deeds might be taken as giving some support to this theory, and certain it is that from the commencement of records Legh has been a township within the parish of Rostherne, where the East Hall family has had a chapel apparently from an early date. Against this there is the undoubted fact that it has never been definitely proved that the Rostherne church was existing as early as 1087,<sup>(1)</sup> and since the place itself is mentioned in *Domesday* without the church, the idea of a wrong

<sup>(1)</sup> The earliest record is that it was in existence "before the year 1188", a hundred years after *Domesday*.

attribution of boundaries is not too convincing, more particularly when the vill of Mere, also noted in the Survey, lies between Rostherne and Legh, and the two are not contiguous. On the other hand, there is no support for either a church or a priest in Legh. Neither is one mentioned in any book or document except *Domesday*. It is difficult to imagine a church so completely disappearing that it left no record whatever behind it. If its existence had any foundation, then all that can be said for it is that it must have been demolished soon after the date of the Survey, or taken over and converted into a private chapel by the heirs of the Venables family. No remnant of a burial ground such as one would expect to find in connection with a village church, however, has ever been discovered, and one is forced to the conclusion that the church of *Domesday*, as a church, must be discounted. Even so, the supposed error in *Domesday* is possibly only an error in description, the words *Presbyter et Ecclesia* being used in a general sense instead of the specific *Capellanus et Capella*. The fact that *Domesday* was prepared by many persons must be borne in mind, and it may be that *ecclesia* of the survey was nothing more than a chapel attached to the house of the Saxon overlord, or, alternatively, a chapel erected immediately after the Conquest by his Norman successor. This would be in accordance with the East Hall tradition, and as the Cornwall Legh assert with some justification, if Leicester and Ormerod had examined the early High Legh deeds it is possible that they would have modified their opinion, and would have been inclined to look to the original East Hall Chapel as providing the missing "church". The late Mr. Henry Cornwall Legh was emphatic that it could not have been the West Hall Chapel, as that branch of the family had not established itself in the village until seventy years or so later.

Such an hypothesis would account for the chaplains met with in the High Legh deeds of the thirteenth century, and incidentally for the advent therein of the rectors of Rostherne.<sup>(1)</sup> The word "Chaplain" occurs for the first time in 1280, "Sir Thomas Chaplain de Lega", and before 1296 this same priest appears on three other occasions, either as "Thomas de Lega, Chaplain" (twice), or simply as "Thomas the Chaplain". It is an interesting speculation whether he is identical with the "Thomas de Ley, Clerk",<sup>(2)</sup> who is one of the witnesses along with the "Parson of Rostherne" to a deed as early as 1245. Undoubtedly chaplains were not necessarily private chaplains, for in sundry documents there are references to chaplains of Rostherne and Great Budworth, where there are known to be

<sup>(1)</sup> Had there been *presbyter* in Legh, he would no doubt have been called in as a witness to the High Legh deeds, if not in place of, at any rate alongside the rectors of Rostherne. The "parson" of Rostherne appears for the first time in a deed of 1245, i.e. in the earliest deed but one in the collection.

<sup>(2)</sup> According to one of the earliest pedigrees this Thomas Legh was one of the younger sons of Adam Legh. The following note stands against his name:—"Chaplain under H3 and Ed 1". In 1245 this Thomas might well have been a clerk in Holy Orders, and identical with the "Thomas de Ley" in question. He is not included in the official pedigree for want of further evidence, though there is little doubt that he was a member of the family, if for no other reason than that of his name.

parish churches and rectors at the time. It is apparent that certain chaplains were the equivalent of the modern attendant curate. This is borne out by a document of 1442 in the High Legh collection. It is a mandate from the official of the archdeacon of Chester to all chaplains of the archdeaconry "beneficed or not", the beneficed chaplains being those attached to parish churches, those not beneficed being private chaplains. It is certain that some of the chaplains mentioned in the High Legh Deeds come under this category.<sup>(1)</sup>

From the foregoing it will be seen that there is considerable support for the theory of the Domesday Chapel as distinct from the Domesday Church, but whether it or that propounded by Ormerod is the right theory, opinions will always differ. Unfortunately there is a gap of about two hundred years between the date of the survey and the advent of chaplains in the earlier High Legh deeds, and all the evidence that can be accepted with any degree of reliability is that there was no "church" in Legh in 1280, that the church of Domesday might have been the chapel of East Hall, and that the chapel existing (by inference) in the thirteenth century was possibly one and the same edifice. Though there is no record of any actual building prior to 1408 there is, however, record of the presence of chaplains, and it is to be presumed that they had somewhere to exercise their ministrations. The fact that private chaplains were in existence in High Legh about this date, 1280, is confirmed in the will of William Danyers, who in 1306 left a bequest to the "Chaplain of Thomas de Legh" of the West Hall.<sup>(2)</sup> There is no question of any beneficed cure; the private domestic chaplain is plainly indicated. If the West Hall had a chaplain it may be safely assumed that the same could be said of East Hall, or that possibly the one chaplain served the two manors in the original Domesday church. The late Mr. Henry Cornwall Legh emphatically stated in his notes, "This latter arrangement is more than probable when it is remembered that the East Hall family were the original Leghs of Legh and were in residence in the vill some fifty years or more before the West Hall people arrived, and in view of the probable relationship the one to the other, it would be only natural that the latecomers should avail themselves of the services and ministrations of the chapel and chaplain attached to the House next door. From their own showing the West Hall family do not claim a chapel of their own until 1408 despite their chaplain of 1306, a factor which tends to confirm

<sup>(1)</sup> With the possible one exception of "Thomas de Lega", no name of a vill appears in the earlier deeds after the name of the office, as it does elsewhere in the case of beneficed chaplains, "Chaplain of Rostherne" and "Chaplain of Budworth" and so on, and when "Thomas the Chaplain" and, on a later occasion, "Nicholas the Chaplain" appear with local people as witnesses to purely Legh of East Hall documents, the only assumption possible is that they were the domestic chaplains attached to the house of Legh. The one exception, "Thomas Chaplain de Lega", need not be stressed too much. *De Lega* was both the name of the village and also the name of the manorial lord. In view of the way in which he is described on all other occasions, it can hardly be doubted that *de Lega* refers in this case to the lord himself and not to the vill, the calling of an owner by the name of his property being a common enough practice at the time. There are several instances of this in the High Legh deeds, "My sister Mere (meaning Legh of Mere)", "My sister Swinehead" (Legh of Swinehead).

<sup>(2)</sup> Original will among West Hall papers, quoted in *High Legh Record Book* by the estate agent, E. G. Wheler 1888. A translation of the will (by J. P. Earwaker) appears in the "Manchester Quarterly Magazine", No. VI, April 1883.

a dual arrangement. If such an arrangement existed, however, it came to an end in 1408, for in that year the Legh of West Hall built a chapel, which is commemorated on an inscription in the present village church.<sup>(1)</sup> This date is confirmed by an entry said to be *ex chartulariis Episcopi Coventriae et Lichfieldiae*, quoted by Vernon and included in Leicester's account of the church in Lymm:—

“9 Hen. 4 Anno 1408 penultimo Augusti concessit Episcopus Incolis, ceu inhabitantiubs Villulam de Leye infra Parochium de Rosthorn, quod possint facere Divina Celebrari in Capella de Leye.”<sup>(2)</sup> Leicester called this *capella* a “chapel of ease”, but that it remained private property is borne out by a subsequent faculty dated 1447 in which William Booth, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, granted permission to Elizabeth Wever, John Legh and Joan his wife to have Divine Service therein, “but no other Sacrament to the detriment of Mother Church.”<sup>(3)</sup> It was further stated by Leicester that the chapel belonged to the Leghs of West Hall, but that the said building was “now converted to other uses by the heirs of that family.” It is plain that the East Hall family had nothing to do with it; their name is not mentioned in either of the licences quoted, and it may be assumed that, after the year 1408 both chapels continued in existence together, as they undoubtedly did in later years, and that they so continued until the disappearance of the West Hall building about the middle of the seventeenth century. It is unlikely that the East Hall family, the more important of the landlords of the vill, should have been completely ignored in the licences unless they were definitely not interested, and were at the time in possession of a chapel of their own.<sup>(4)</sup> That the two chapels were in existence together c. 1625 is confirmed by documentary evidence, for in King's *Vale Royal* written about the time<sup>(5)</sup> the following description is given:—

“This is plain; that two distinct descents of the same name (Legh) have their seats in the same place (High Legh) and there have continued in a long succession of their Ancestors. Knights and Esquires of much worth; which two, as they are one in name, so have their houses, their Chapels, and their demesnes, neighbouring one to another, as near as can be, whereof one is Thomas Leigh's (East Hall) the other Peter Leigh's (West Hall) Esquires.”<sup>(6)</sup>

There is nothing there to indicate that either chapel is of modern foundation. The implication is rather the reverse.

The first direct evidence of the East Hall Chapel as it exists today was that it was founded by Thomas Legh in 1581. Randle Holmes

<sup>(1)</sup> See below, p. 133.

<sup>(2)</sup> “On 30 August 1408 in the ninth year of Henry IV's reign, the bishop allowed the residents, as well as those who lived in the village of Legh within the parish of Rostherne, to have Mass celebrated in Legh Chapel.”

<sup>(3)</sup> Old deed in possession some years ago of the late Mr. Egerton Leigh of West Hall, and referred to in the *High Legh Record Book* by E. G. Wheler, 1888. A copy of the wording of the deed is now at High Legh Hall.

<sup>(4)</sup> At this time the East Hall family owned half the area of Legh, the West Hall a quarter. Can it be that the word *Villula* (small house) of the 1408 licence was specifically used to differentiate between the house of West Hall and the house of the principal landowner adjoining (i.e. East Hall)?

<sup>(5)</sup> Incorporated in the *History of Cheshire*, published by John Poole 1778, p. 246.

<sup>(6)</sup> As this Thomas Leigh (should be Legh) was buried on 4 February 1627/8, the date 1625 cannot be far out.

confirmed this date in the *Harleian MSS.*, and explained that it was cut in stone on the outside of the building together with the coat-of-arms and the motto, *Pour Dieu et pour terre*. It is further recorded that in a window divided into four sections by stone mullions, at the east end of the chapel there were two armorial achievements, viz. (1) Arms, quarterly, 1 and 4, a *lion rampant* for Legh; 2 and 3, *semee of cross-crosslets* and three eagles displayed for Alpraham. Crest, a *demi lion rampant* on an esquire's helm, with mantling. (2) A *lion rampant* for Legh, impaling a *griffin segreant* with a crescent for difference for Trafford of the Garret, with mantling. Underneath was this inscription:—*Orate pro bono statu Thome Leigh Armigeri dominus de Leigh et Isabella uxor et filie et Herede Georgii Trafford de le garel qui istam Capellam foundaverunt Anno dom. 1581*. Sir Peter Leicester also stated that it was "built" in that year.<sup>(1)</sup> The late Mr. Henry Cornwall Legh again emphasized two difficulties, one the doubtful Latinity in the window inscription, and the other the unreliability of Leicester in anything pertaining to the East Hall family, as Leicester had no first-hand information to work upon. This he clearly indicated in his chapter on High Legh when he wrote:—"Here should have followed the descent of the other Legh de East Hall in High Legh but I could not have the perusal of the evidences of that family. For that Henry Legh Esquire, now owner thereof, affirmed that his deeds were most of them lost in the late war." That this was merely an excuse given by Henry Legh is obvious, and Leicester, the indefatigable antiquary, but faintly disguised his disbelief in the statement. One can imagine the hardy warrior Henry, who had been through the vicissitudes of the Civil War and the sequestration of his estates, being in no mood for pedigrees or for matters of family history, and Leicester was sent away empty handed. On his way back to nearby Nether Tabley he found out what he could on his own account. He saw the chapel and wrote that it was built in 1581 by Thomas Legh, "as I find the year, his name and coat-of-arms engraven in the stone on the side of the said chapel". Leicester's statement that it was built in that year, therefore, must not necessarily be taken as implying that it was an entirely new building. He used the same word "built" in his reference to the New Hall,<sup>(2)</sup> which was erected at the same time, when more accurately the latter replaced another hall recently pulled down. Unfortunately, the window is similarly equivocal. *Foundaverunt* (? *Fundaverunt*) might apply either way. It is not the word that one would ordinarily expect to find in the case of a new

<sup>(1)</sup> This date is also given in Stringer's painting of the hall and chapel painted in 1781. Holmes stated that the window was much damaged. On each of the two outer sections of the window there was a figure kneeling at a *prie-dieu*. The figure on the left represented Thomas Legh. He was in armour and wore a surcoat with his arms and with a silver fringe. He was portrayed as kneeling on a tasselled cushion and his arms were raised together in prayer. Near to the cushion were a helmet and a gauntlet. On the right-hand section and facing Thomas Legh was a representation of his wife in a similar attitude. She was wearing a hood, kirtle and mantle and was accompanied by a small dog (*Cheshire Sheaf*, Third Series, xiii, frontispiece and pp. 35 and 36). Ormerod remarked that the prayer books on the desks were open at the 119th Psalm, a song that sets out very fully the blessings that attend a life of lofty aspirations and obedience to divine commands.

<sup>(2)</sup> The date on the present hall is 1782.

original building. *Fundo* is more to secure for the future, or to set upon a firm footing, rather than to build or erect as a first creation, and it is probable that it was in this former connection that the word was purposely used. It is known that the year in which the chapel is dated, the Old Hall was pulled down and the Elizabethan mansion erected in its stead. This Old Hall was situated on the roadside, even as the chapel remained until comparatively recent times, and it is reasonable to assume that at the demolition of the ancient hall, the old chapel was left standing (it may have been actually attached to the hall), possibly enlarged, restored, and finished off as a separate building. Sir Stephen Glynn observed when he visited the chapel early last century:—<sup>(1)</sup>

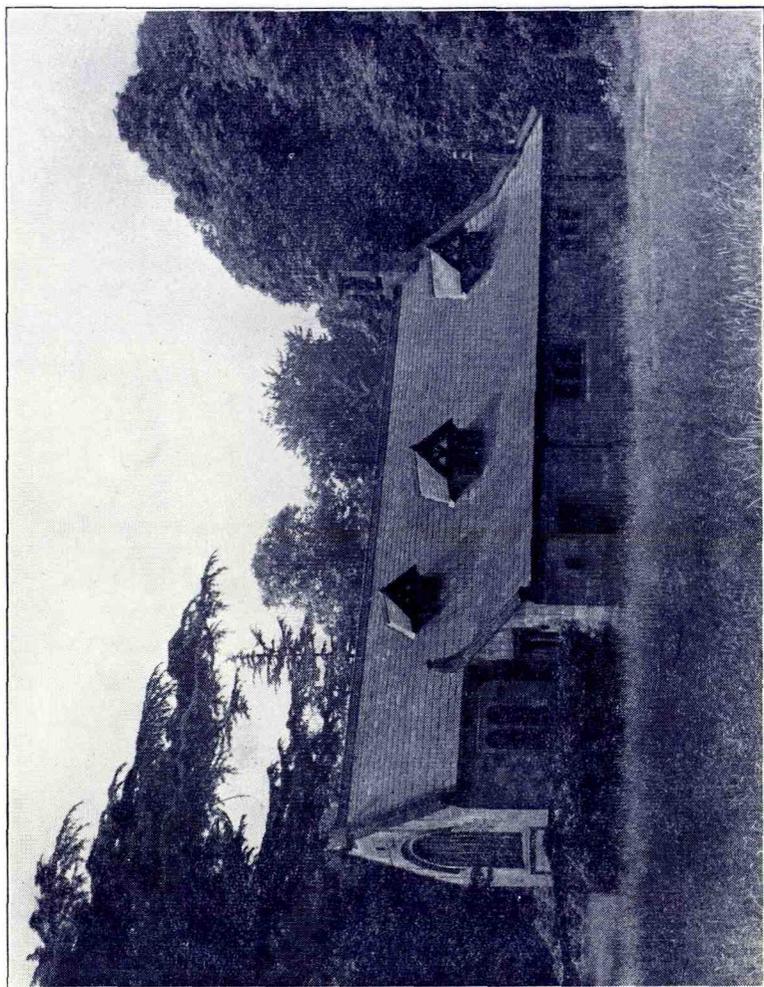
“This is a curious specimen of a domestic chapel, built separate from the hall. Its date is said to be 1581. It has a body with north and south aisles. The eastern part enclosed for the chancel. The walls are of stone, the arcade of wood. Some parts seem to be of earlier date than that mentioned. The windows Perpendicular, some lately filled with stained glass; the interior very nicely arranged and fitted with open seats, carved screens and a good organ.”

Further, most of the medallions in the windows are of antiquity, nearly all being pre-Reformation and two of them possibly early fourteenth century glass. Neither of these facts is conclusive; the medallions might have been purchased at a later date, while the older parts of the building might have been part of the Old Hall, with nothing whatever to do with a previous chapel. Yet on the assumption that such a chapel did exist from the earlier days, the use of the word *fundaverunt* is understandable. Thomas Legh set it on a surer foundation for the future. He urged his son in his will, dated 29 October 1589 to: “keepe yearlie some honest learned man that cann saye divine Service to serve at my Chappell at High Leghe, for the ease of my tenants, frendes and well willers of my howse.” and he left money to defray the cost of the same.<sup>(2)</sup>

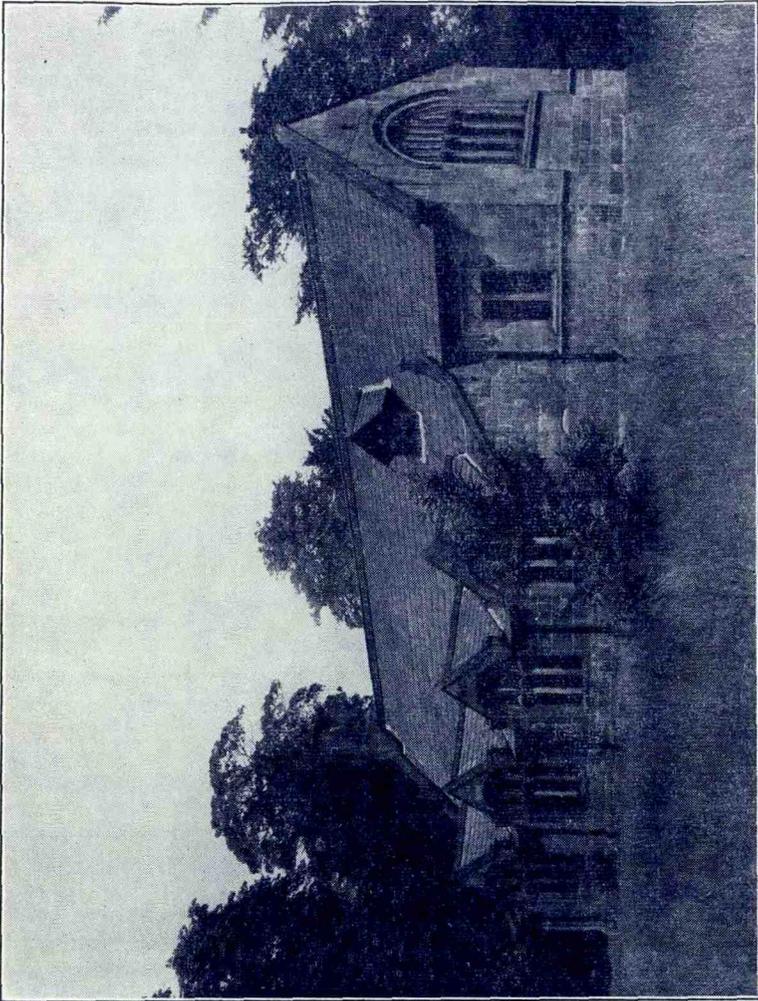
It is interesting to observe that the East Hall family had a chapel in their parish church at Rostherne, and in the High Legh deeds there is a document which should be considered in any attempt to trace the former existence of the East Hall Chapel. It is an arbitration award in a claim made by Thomas Legh, who founded the 1581 building, against Sir Randle Mainwaring for possession of the said chapel at Rostherne Church. The question is why should such a claim be necessary, for if he had no chapel at home Thomas Legh must surely have been attending to his religious duties in his parish church. Wherefore the necessity of turning somebody out? The arbitration award is an interesting document. It is dated at the head, “the 26th day of November in the 21st year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth” (i.e. 1578), but beneath the signature of Sir Randle Mainwaring appears the date 1580, obviously written at the same

<sup>(1)</sup> The Rev. J. A. Atkinson, M.A., D.C.L., who edited Sir Stephen Glynn's notes on the churches of Cheshire in 1894, stated that the chapel was burnt down in 1891. Very obviously he was misinformed of the identity of the High Legh Chapels, as it was the Chapel of St. John in High Legh which perished in that manner.

<sup>(2)</sup> It is not unworthy of notice that Earwaker in his *History of the Legh family*, both in the text and in the abstracted pedigree, entered this Thomas Legh as having re-built the chapel.



HIGH LEGH  
THE CHAPEL OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY  
Exterior from the north-east.



HIGH LEGH  
THE CHAPEL OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY  
Exterior from the south-east.

time. Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne on 17 November 1558, so that the 26 of November was only just inside another year, and it is possible that the clerk overlooked this at the moment of engrossing, and entered the twenty-first year instead of the twenty-second as he should have done. That would make the deed November 1579, and render Sir Randle Mainwaring's date a little more intelligible. Be that as it may, there is the noteworthy fact that Thomas Legh was fighting for his chapel at Rostherne almost at the same time that he was engaged upon his chapel at High Legh, for though the latter is dated 1581, it was in course of erection in 1580, as is proved by the inscription on the bell:—

T. Legh of High Legh Esquier 1580;—  
Recast 1878.

Having successfully recovered Rostherne there would seem to be no object in Legh starting to build a chapel at High Legh unless he had always had one. It is plain from the award that the said Rostherne Chapel belonged to the Legh family of old, but for some reason or other they had ceased to use it. Randle Holmes stated that the Legh Chapel at Rostherne stood ruinous in the sixteenth century for want of glass, that Sir Randle Mainwaring repaired it at his own expense, and that he assumed possession for himself and his family only to be turned out by Thomas Legh, to whom "his heirs and assigns" the Arbitrators now awarded the chapel "for ever". For how long it had been out of use by the Leghs there is nothing to show, but it must have been for some considerable time to render it out of knowledge of people in general, and to necessitate arbitration and the production of proprietary evidences. This is brought out in the award:—"Where before this tyme dywse (diverse) variances strives suyte (suit) and debate have byn (been) had moved stirred and long dependenge". If, therefore, in spite of owning the chapel, Thomas Legh had not been attending it, there is but one inference that can be drawn from his abstention; that he had somewhere else to go to, probably his own chapel at home. One thing is certain: Thomas and his family never went to the West Hall Chapel. The feud which started shortly before his birth went on all through the century, and culminated in the flare-up over the Arms, which occurred about the date of this arbitration. In the circumstances the Rostherne squabble largely confirms the existence of the East Hall Chapel prior to 1581.<sup>(1)</sup> Thus Leicester in dealing with the early Church in England:—

"But because also in many parishes families lived so remote from the Church, that they could not conveniently frequent the same, it was indulged to such that they might build a private Oratory in or near theyr Mansion places, reserving for the most part the right of Baptism and Sepulture to the Parish Church . . . or Mother Church. It was also provided that those families (notwithstanding

<sup>(1)</sup> In this connection, it is interesting to note that there appears to be a consecration cross cut into one of the stones at the west door. If it be such a cross, it must have been cut before the Reformation, as all records vouch for the present building not being consecrated, thereby confirming a previous chapel. The cross is distinct enough, and appears to have been deliberately cut.

their grant from the Bishop for a private Oratory) should upon more solemn feast days repair to their Parish Church. . . . These private Oratories were afterwards called Capellae (Chapels); and those that did exercise in them the Ministerial Function were called Capellani, (Chaplains)."

It is possible that the Leghs having their private chapel at High Legh attended Rostherne in the beginning upon greater festivals only, and gradually discarded even these few attendances during the Reformation until they never attended at all. They were papists well into the seventeenth century, and with the changes and chances of the times, the frequent inhibitions and reinstatements both of parish priests and prayer books, it is not to be wondered at that those who possessed a private chapel, forsook their mother church, and preferred to look to their own chaplain for a time for all their spiritual requirements. Hence the advent of Sir Randle Mainwaring and the arbitration.

Summarizing the evidence, the late Mr. Henry Cornwall Legh in his invaluable notes concludes:—"With this, we come back to 1581, and to the end of all information it has been possible to discover, in an endeavour to find something which might throw light upon the previous existence of the East Hall Chapel, without which all speculation as to the Domesday site must remain a matter of tradition, and we have to bow to the fact that though circumstances point to such an existence, there is not a solitary piece of documentary evidence as to any actual building. Not that that disproves the building; we are dealing with a time before records were properly kept, and when county historians had not begun to appear, and if the High Legh Muniment Room cannot help us, we can hardly expect information elsewhere.<sup>(1)</sup> Indeed, the only public record of the West Hall Chapel prior to 1600 depends upon the statement of Leicester, that it "was built about the reign of Henry IV", for in a recent search at Lichfield no note of the 1408 licence quoted by Vernon, nor of the reputed licence of 1447, could be discovered under their respective years, the Registrar inclining to the idea that matters connected with domestic chapels would not be entered.<sup>(2)</sup> In these circumstances, that there is no record of the East Hall Chapel is not surprising." But the strong presumptive evidence as to its existence in the early sixteenth century,<sup>(3)</sup> before the present building was erected, gives reason to suppose that the same Chapel, or alternately another erected on the same spot, was almost certainly

<sup>(1)</sup> Unfortunately, the evidence of chaplains collapses in the High Legh Deeds in the middle of the fifteenth century when the custom of calling upon local people to be present, and of inserting their names as witnesses was beginning to be discontinued. The last "chaplain" or "clerk" occurs in 1464, and by 1500 this kind of witness had disappeared altogether.

<sup>(2)</sup> Henry Cornwall Legh does not mean by this to throw doubt upon the licences in question which we are convinced were actually given, but only to convey that such licences were not officially recorded. On the contrary, at High Legh there is a copy of the wording of the 1447 document, the original of which was at one time in the possession of the late Mr. Surridge, when Incumbent of St. John's Church, High Legh. Unfortunately, it was not handed over to the East Hall family when the advowson came to them in 1909, and Miss Surridge was unable to lay her hands on it.

<sup>(3)</sup> Perhaps the best "evidence" of them all lies in the proved existence of the West Hall Chapel. One can hardly imagine (today at any rate) a state of affairs, under which a greater part of the people of High Legh had to travel seven miles to Rostherne and back for their services, while a small minority had the privilege of a chapel at home.

existing in 1300, two hundred years or so before. If that be allowed, then a descent from the time of *Domesday*, and the maintenance of the site is not impossible or improbable. Certainly nothing has turned up in our researches to dispose either the one or the other, at that we must leave it.<sup>(1)</sup>

After the death in 1589 of Thomas the founder, there is a reference in *Vale Royal* to the chapel in 1625, and it is stated in the *Swinehead Chartularies* that several members of the family (Legh of Swinehead) were baptized there up to and including 1638. It may be assumed, therefore, that until the time of the Commonwealth a resident chaplain was in charge. By 1714, however, a great change had come about, as is evidenced by the following account of the chapel which appears in *Notitia Cestriensis* written about that year by Bishop Francis Gastrell:—

“Certif(ied) that nothing belongs to it. It is not consecrated: said to be Domestick to the Leghs of High Legh; very neat and kept in good repair by Mr. Legh, who gives 10s. ev(ery) other Sund(ay) to have Preaching and Devine Service performed in it.”<sup>(2)</sup>

This was a sad falling away from the intentions of the founder, whether it is to be attributed to the ravages of the Civil War, or to the gross slackness which permeated the Church in England during the following century. With the seizure of the estates, and the flight to France of the owner, Henry, it is more than likely that the chaplain disappeared at the same time, and that for a period the chapel services were interrupted. There is little doubt that the building was ransacked at the time, for there is no pre-Civil War communion plate, and one has only to look at the ancestral window to see that the ancestors' heads must have been deliberately poked out. It may be that the fortnightly ministrations emanated from the reopening of the chapel after Henry had returned and repossessed his estates. Whether this is what happened or not must always be conjecture. It is, however, known that in 1714 there was no resident chaplain, and that a day was to come when even these fortnightly services were to cease, for in 1753 a petition was drawn up by the inhabitants of the village, and presented to another Henry who then owned the property, praying him to provide a minister fortnightly at their expense, and to allow them to use the private chapel:—

“We whose names are hereunto . . . do hereby petition Henry Legh of High Legh aforesaid Esquire to provide a Minister to officiate in his Domestick Chapel in High Legh aforesaid once a fortnight, or as often as the said Henry

<sup>(1)</sup> It has not been possible to consult the archives at Lichfield. The Registrar informed the late Henry Cornwall Legh after correspondence upon the subject, that it would be a “colossal work” to search through their thirteen volumes of entries dating from 1297 to 1541 for any reference to the chapel, when the entries are in various contractions of Latin, not indexed and several of the older ones much out of order of date. It would take a professional searcher months of work, he said, to make a satisfactory search. He concluded, “One can only appreciate the enormous amount of work that would be entailed when simply glancing at these old records. . . . I know it would run you into a very large sum of money with very little or no result.”

<sup>(2)</sup> F. Gastrell, *Notitia Cestriensis*, ed. F. R. Raines, Chetham Society Publications, Vol. VIII (1845), p. 346.

shall appoint, and that the said Henry Legh will permit us and our families to attend and hear Divine Service in his said Chapel."<sup>(1)</sup>

There is nothing to indicate for how long the chapel had been out of use, but the answer to this petition was apparently the appointment again of a resident chaplain, for when Henry's son died in 1773, one of the witnesses to his will was a William Hatton, who signed himself as "Minister of High Legh Chapel", and whose name is referred back to in correspondence as late as 1813.<sup>(2)</sup> So far as can be seen there has been a resident Chaplain since that time (1773). Certain it is that prior to 1813 the West Hall Leghs had been attending the East Hall Chapel, and in that year George John Legh wrote appointing a Mr. Wood "in the same way as I have always done it". The list of chaplains is complete since 1818, though it is a surprise to find that in two or three of the earliest appointments the chaplain was ordained deacon on a title to High Legh Chapel.<sup>(3)</sup> It shows the depths into which the Church in England had fallen, when a priest could be dispensed with for all ordinary occasions, and the Communion Service relegated to a few periodical trips to the Parish Church at Rostherne, to "three times a year", no doubt, "of which Easter to be one". It is yet another shock to read of the upheaval that had taken place in the internal arrangements of the chapel, for at sometime or other prior to this period, the whole of the east end had been given up to the family "box". There is no information as to where the altar was placed. The pulpit and reading desk were at the west end, and it was not until about the year 1810 that the family box was shortened to enable "a Communion table" to be put against the east wall.<sup>(4)</sup> This casual arrangement continued until the year 1836 when some considerable structural alterations were effected, and a further move made to furnish the chapel in its original form. In that year a new east window was put in, and the altar placed directly under it, with the Legh box and organ on either side. A south aisle was added, and the main entrance hitherto on the south side was removed to the west, and the stone containing the family arms originally on the outside of the east wall re-erected above the porch.

Though it is nowhere specifically mentioned, the north wall must have been thrown out a few feet at the same time.<sup>(5)</sup> The size of the chapel before the 1835 alterations was forty-eight feet long by twenty-seven feet wide,<sup>(6)</sup> the former measure being from the west

<sup>(1)</sup> High Legh Deeds No. 249, dated 8 December 1753.

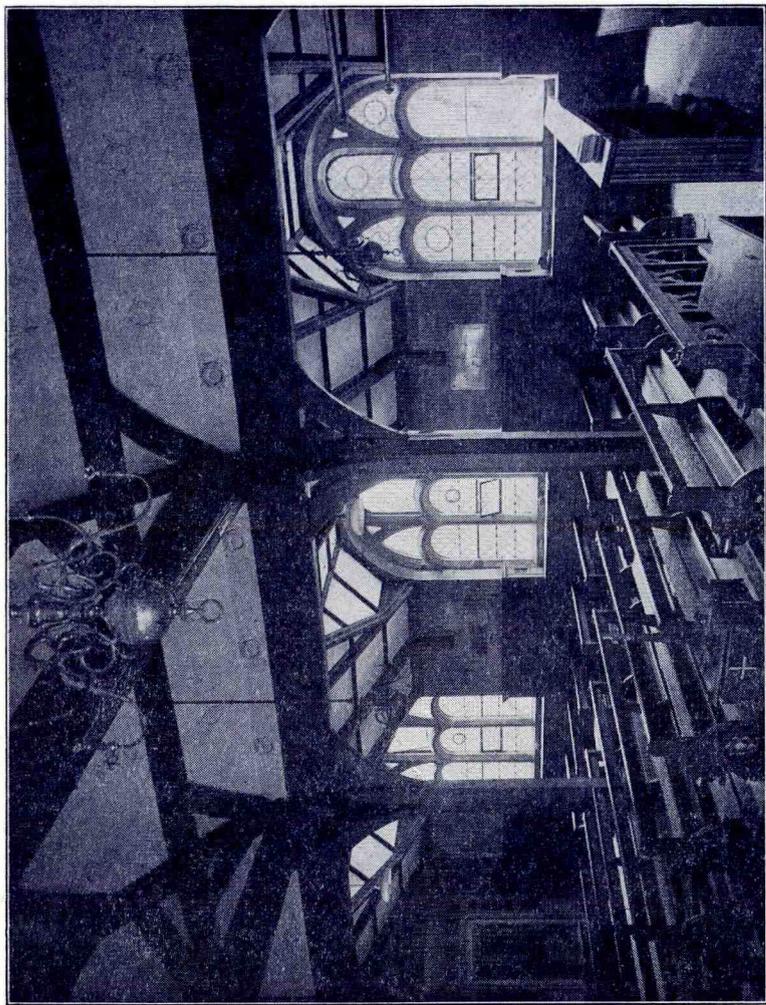
<sup>(2)</sup> High Legh letters.

<sup>(3)</sup> *Ultra vires* of course. This is brought out by the Bishop in a letter to G. J. Legh of 1823 in connection with the appointment to the chaplaincy of a Mr. Hinchliffe:—"You are, of course, aware that he will be the third clergyman whom I have Ordained to your Domestic Chapel, though you may not probably know it is not usual with any Bishop to admit the same as a qualification to orders." Apparently there was a law at the time that each bishop had to provide for any clergyman he had ordained, should he be in want, and to get over the difficulty Legh gave letters of indemnity to the bishop.

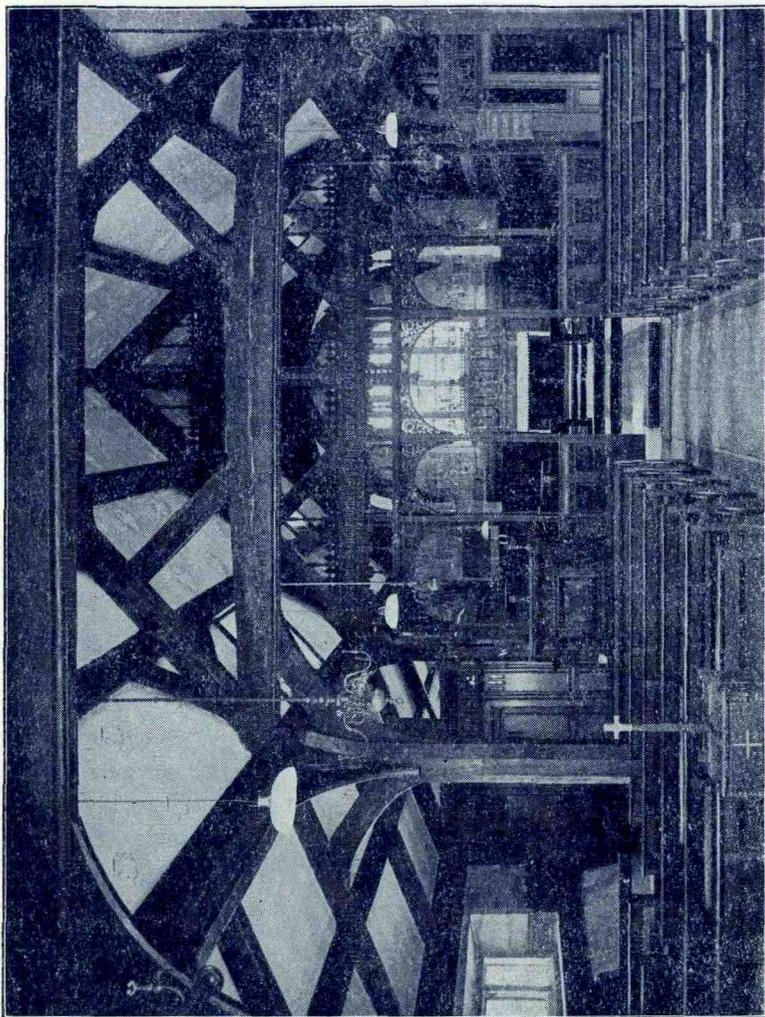
<sup>(4)</sup> Ormerod refers to this alteration as having been "lately" effected. *Op. cit.*, 1818 edition, Vol. I, p. 460.

<sup>(5)</sup> Not redesigned. The wall with its windows is exactly the same today as in the picture (c. 1800), and doubtless is the original. The south wall was partially redesigned obviously with a view to letting in more light.

<sup>(6)</sup> *Vide* old plan drawn to scale. Ormerod also gives this measurement in his 1818 edition.



HIGH LEGH  
THE CHAPEL OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY  
Interior looking to the south aisle.



HIGH LEGH  
THE CHAPEL OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY  
Interior looking east.

wall to the present communion rails, and the latter to approximately two feet beyond the oak piers on each side of the nave. It is plain that this extension could not have been made prior to 1835, or the original oak pillars on the opposite side would have been outside the building according to the measurement: equally, it could not have been later, or the chapel would have appeared lop-sided in the interval, which is certainly not apparent in a drawing made in 1839. In 1858 the internal arrangements of the chapel took on their present shape. Butterfield was the architect. He repewed the chapel and made it to accommodate some two hundred persons. The pulpit and reading desk were restored to their original positions; much old ornamental oak was added<sup>(1)</sup> a new organ was installed;<sup>(2)</sup> stained glass to the memory of George Legh was inserted in the east window;<sup>(3)</sup> the Legh box was done away with (its place being taken by the vestry) and pews reserved for the family were arranged in the central aisle. So the chapel remained until 1884 when a very complete restoration was undertaken by Colonel Henry Martin Cornwall-Legh at a cost of some 4,000. J. Oldrid Scott, a son of Sir Gilbert Scott, was the architect. A small sanctuary was added, the communion rails now being where the altar formerly stood. Stained glass by Kempe was put into the east and west windows, and the old glass redistributed. The whole of the building was wainscoted in oak, and timbers which were rotten were replaced. A new chancel screen and a new marble font were erected, the present reredos placed over the altar, the organ completely restored and the hall pews transferred to the west wall. Having been very thoroughly renovated the chapel was reopened and blessed by the Bishop of Chester on 7 November 1884 when the surpliced choir was introduced.<sup>(4)</sup> Some time after the death of Colonel Henry Cornwall Legh the marble font given at the 1884 restoration was replaced by a stone structure considered more in keeping with the period of the building. The late Mr. Henry Cornwall-Legh in 1929 had it replaced by the present oak font, which he accidentally discovered by its coat-of-arms in the Rostherne Church vestry. On subsequent investigation it was ascertained that the font had been lent to Rostherne by Col. Henry Cornwall-Legh at the time of the chapel restoration, when the church baptistry was also undergoing repairs. Probably owing to the erection of the marble font it was not required, and its return never effected. It is an indifferent but not unpleasing piece of work made from old oak taken out of the chapel at one of the previous restorations. It was made and painted by a former

<sup>(1)</sup> Pulpit, reading desks etc.

<sup>(2)</sup> Presented by the tenants it is said.

<sup>(3)</sup> On looking at the various pictures of the chapel, one cannot but be struck by the way the east window has been constantly altered. From the original small window of four lights, as shown in 1781 and later, we find a much larger one of five lights in 1819, only to be followed by a larger one still, and of an entirely different architecture, sometime before 1834. This latter was replaced again in 1835, by a four-light window more or less on the original lines, which remains unto this day. It is probable that the shortening of the Legh box put the family too far away from the light, and caused the first alteration, subsequently found not to be good enough. The south chancel window also shared in these alterations to some extent.

<sup>(4)</sup> Prior to 1884 a list of chapel baptisms was sent monthly to Rostherne for inclusion in the registers of the Parish Church. Since that date a separate register has been kept, though the vicar of Rostherne is furnished with an exact copy.

chaplain in 1868.<sup>(1)</sup> However, as many of the tenants who remembered it as children were glad to see it put back and reblessed on 1 December 1929, further comment is unnecessary, especially as it took the place of an equally indifferent Victorian font.

In its present form the chapel consists of a nave and chancel with shallow side aisles, a small modern apse and a western porch surmounted by a bell turret. The arcade piers on each side consist of three wooden octagonal posts, which extend to the eastern wall of the chancel. To the north and south of the chancel are parclose screens, the northern bay serving as a robing room and vestry, and that on the south as an organ chamber. The pointed roof is of tie beam construction with small arch braces and struts, the plaster intersections being embellished with tudor roses and *fleur-de-lys*. The roof of the north aisle containing some old oak is set out with a centre purlin and intermediate rafters, in all eight bays making sixteen compartments. The south aisle roof is comparatively modern as is the new sanctuary roof, which is set out in compartments with plaster elaborations. The west wall has a central window of three lights over the porch, with two smaller windows of two lights placed at either side and at a lower elevation. The porch terminates in a boldly carved panel depicting the Legh arms with shield, helm, crest and mantling. The north wall has two windows of three lights with square heads of Tudor domestic character, and a doorway leading to the chaplain's robing room or vestry. The south aisle is lighted by four windows of three lights having pleasing head tracery which terminate in gabled heads which rise conspicuously above the level of the lean-to aisle roof. The new sanctuary has an east window of four lights with head tracery containing eight small lights, and two lesser windows each of two lights on the north and south walls. With the exception of the sanctuary, almost all the masonry in the building appears to be old stone reused in the various remodellings, the aisles having been widened as late as 1835. Wisely all the ivy which obscured much of the masonry has been recently removed, and the giant yew tree which formerly grew on the south side by the south-west window and a second tree at the north-west corner have been felled. There remain, however, in close proximity to the north side of the chapel two very fine trees, a cedar and a copper beech, the latter having been planted by Robert Moffat the celebrated missionary, who was at High Legh in 1813-14 as a garden-boy. The interior of the chapel is exceptionally pleasing. The old and new furnishings blend well together. The holy table is a rebuilt example with three elaborate Jacobean legs of an ornate character. The altar rails are richly carved and accord with the reader's desk and the pulpit. In the chancel are two fine Jacobean chairs, one of domestic character with a wooden seat, and the other upholstered in red cloth. The chancel has two brass candelabra with eight sconces in two tiers of

<sup>(1)</sup> The name of the chaplain, F. Humphrey Hall, was subsequently discovered carved on the bottom of the pedestal, together with *PXT—Fecit 1868*. *PXT* is a contraction for *pinxit*—painted.

four, possibly of the eighteenth century. The remainder of the candelabra in the body of the church would appear to be Victorian.

The following are the memorial tablets:—  
At the north side of the nave.

In Loving remembrance of  
Hubert Cornwall Legh.  
Lt.Col. 60th Rifles.  
Past Provincial Grand Master of Cheshire.  
Died April 5th 1926.  
Aged 68 years.  
He gave of his best for his country.  
This tablet is erected by his wife.

To the glory of God and in memory of  
George Cornwall Legh of High Legh.  
Who died June 16th 1877 aged 73 years.

This chapel was restored and the sanctuary added  
In the year of our Lord 1884 by his nephew Lt. Col. Henry Cornwall Legh,  
Who also erected the east window as a memorial to the Rev'd. Henry Cornwall  
Legh  
His father sometime chaplain of this chapel who died Nov. 24th 1847 aged 36  
years.

North side of the chancel.

To the Glory of God  
And in affectionate remembrance of  
Lt. Col. Henry Martin Cornwall Legh,  
Late Grenadier Guards,  
Born Nov. 14th 1839,  
Died Oct. 30th 1904.  
The chapel was restored and enlarged by him  
in 1884.

South side of the chancel.

Charles Henry George Cornwall Legh of High Legh,<sup>(1)</sup>  
5th June 1876 to 16th October 1934.  
*REQUIESCAT IN PACE.*

South side of the nave.

To the glory of God and in memory of  
The Rev'd C. H. Wilkinson.  
This tablet was erected by  
Lt. Col. Henry Cornwall Legh  
to whom he was Private Chaplain for 7 years.  
He died after two days illness at High Legh,  
on the 18th October 1891, aged 31.

*In Memoriam*  
Richard Cornwall Legh.  
Died 10th Jan. 1876,  
and Ina Legh his wife  
Died 21st March 1883.  
This tablet is erected by their three  
sons in token of their affection  
and gratitude.

<sup>(1)</sup> This plate covers a niche in the wall in which rests the casket containing his ashes.

The late Mr. Henry Cornwall Legh with his usual thoroughness, placed on the west door the following brief history of High Legh Chapel:—

“This is the domestic chapel of the Legh family, built in 1581 by Thomas Legh of High Legh. It is probable that a chapel existed on the same spot prior to that date as parts of the building are said to be of earlier construction, and references exist in the early family documents to Chaplains of Legh. The Chapel though not consecrated has been blessed and dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and from time to time has been restored, the last restoration being in 1884, when the present sanctuary was added. Prior to that date the altar stood where the communion rails are now situated. One or two of the medallions on the north aisle windows are fourteenth century while an old 1581 window, mutilated no doubt when the High Legh estates were sequestered at the time of the Civil War, will be seen in the wall on the south side of the Altar. The Chapel appears in Watt’s Engraving of the Old Hall (destroyed by fire) published in 1784, and the stone of 1581 containing the family coat of arms, formerly on the outside of the east wall, is now installed above the west end porch. The following is an extract from the will of Thomas Legh dated the 28th of October 1589.

“I gyve my lease whiche I have in North wood Pke to the said George Leghe so that he doe keep yearelie some honest learned man that cann say divine service to serve at my Chappell at High Leghe for the Ease of my tenants, frendes and wellwillers of my house of High Leghe.”

“Though the Chapel is private property, entirely maintained by the owner, it is open to anyone who may care to attend its services; all seats are unappropriated with the exception of those along the westend wall which are reserved for the family and household.

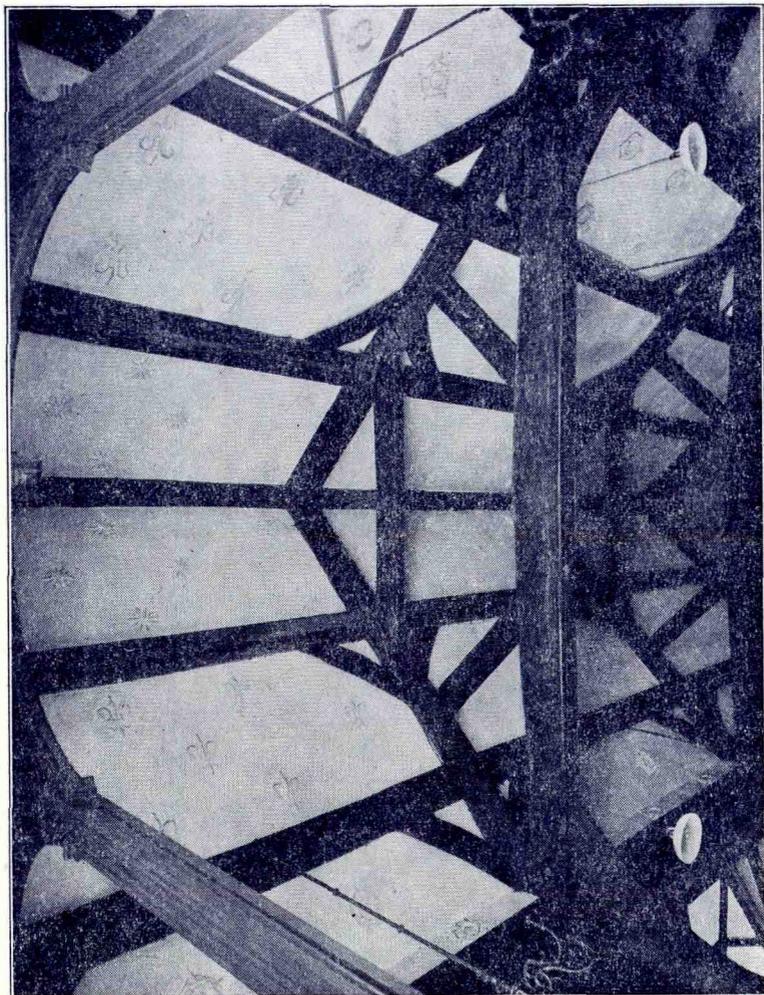
C. H. G. Cornwall Legh.

B. S. Lombard, O.B.E., H.C.F.

High Legh Hall.

Feast of the Annunciation 1931.”

The Baptism register bears a note in the hand of Henry Cornwall-Legh which reads:—“Given to Colonel Cornwall-Legh by the Revnd. H. A. D. Surrige, Nov. 7th 1884.” The first baptism, recorded 16 November 1884, was that of Grace Florence, daughter of James and Annie Wilson, coachman to the High Legh family. The ceremony was performed by the Rev. C. Winsor. In all there are three hundred and forty-two entries in the register, the most recent ceremony being 22 June 1948, when Barbara Katherine, daughter of the present owner’s brother, Mr. E. H. S. Cornwall-Legh, was baptized, the ceremony being performed by the Revd. Arthur E. L. Walker, M.A., Vicar of Feckenham, Worcester, uncle of the squire, and the Revd. John Hughes, M.A., Vicar of Rostherne. An important date in the chapel’s history was the celebration on 29 April 1931, of the 350th anniversary of the building. The date chosen was the nearest to the Feast of the Annunciation, transferred on account of Easter, which was convenient to the Bishop of Chester who had promised to come. The festival started with Mass at 7 a.m. by the chaplain, The Rev. B. S. Lombard, O.B.E., H.C.F., and at 8 a.m. by the bishop, the Right Rev. H. L. Paget, D.D., both robed in the beautiful vestments of the chapel, and ended with Evensong at 7 p.m. with procession and solemn *Te Deum* at which



HIGH LEGH  
THE CHAPEL OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY  
Roof details looking east.

the Bishop pontificated and preached. The Rev. A. E. L. Walker acted as bishop's chaplain, and the other clergy present besides Fr. Lombard were the Rev. John Oliver of St. John's, High Legh, and Fr. Vickers of Oughtrington. It was truly a memorable day, and one which left its mark on many present.

Until the death in 1934 of Mr. Henry Cornwall Legh the chapel was carefully maintained by the family, the squire providing his own organist and surpliced choir. All offertories, taken only at Mass except upon Easter Day and the harvest thanksgiving when Evensong was also included, were given to selected charities. Nothing was deducted therefrom towards the cost of the services. Until this date the *Angelus* sounded daily across the park, and with its frequent services and Sunday evening congregations of about eighty worshippers, it could truly be said that High Legh Chapel carried out to the full the mandate of Thomas the Founder. In 1935, however, death duties inevitably forced the closure of the chapel, and it was not used for regular worship until the War Department requisitioned the Hall upon the outbreak of war in 1939. Mr. Cornwall-Legh gave the free use of the building to the chaplain at the camp subject to the one condition that no compulsory service should ever be held within its walls. In 1941 a heavy bomb fell in the West Hall grounds, and though the blast was softened by the trees and high wall intervening, it unfortunately blew out the west-end windows and damaged the pre-Reformation stained glass medallions in the north windows. The former were replaced and the latter repaired in 1949.

The following is a list of the private chaplains as complete as it has been possible to make it.

1773	William Hatton.
1818	Bertie C. Johnson, M.A. (Deacon's title).
1823	P. Hordern, M.A.
1823-1830	Edward Hinchliffe, M.A. (Deacon 1823, Priest 1825).
1830-1833	James Warburton (Deacon's title).
1833-1836	Edward Hinchliffe, M.A. (again).
1837-1840	H. Cornwall Legh.
1841	Hodgson.
1842-1845	Algernon Peyton.
1846	Robert Couper Black, M.A.
1847-1849	Charles Hare.
1850-1854	William Blake, M.A.
1855-1857	T. F. Drake.
1858-1860	John Sedgwick, D.D., M.A.
1861-1864	Charles Henry Nutt, M.A.
1865-1867	Harvey Muriel.
1868-1873	F. Humphrey Hall.
1874-1884	Charles John Winser, M.A.
1885-1891	Harry Collard Wilkinson.
1892-1901	W. H. F. Wayne.
1902-1907	G. A. Jackson.
1907-1917	E. H. Edwardes.
1918-1922	C. J. Jackson.
1922-1930	T. N. Carter . . . (Acting) Evensong only.
1930-1935	B. S. Lombard, O.B.E., H.C.F.

CHAPEL OF ST. JOHN  
HIGH LEGH

OF the ancient chapel attached to the West Hall at High Legh, Dr. George Ormerod writing sometime before 1819 observed:—

“To the north of the West Hall, and at a short distance from it, has recently been re-erected the West Hall Chapel, which Sir Peter Leyester notices as being, in his time, ‘converted to other uses.’<sup>(1)</sup> The building is an oblong, about 51 feet by 42 feet. The sides and east end are of red stone; the west end, which faces the road, is of white stone, and of Grecian architecture, from a design by Harrison. This front is ornamented with four Ionic pillars, supporting a pediment, under which is the following inscription, on a tablet over the entrance:

*Deo. opt. max.*  
*Hoc ipso situ ædiculam*  
*Jam vetustate sublapso,*  
*Posuit Proavorum Pietas,*  
*A.D. 1408.*  
*Hoc Sacellum, pace reduci,*  
*Restituendum curavit*  
*Egertonus Leigh,*  
*A.D. 1814.”<sup>(2)</sup>*

A view of the chapel, executed by Braunston from a drawing by the Hon. Mrs. Abercrombie, was presented to Dr. Ormerod by Mr. Egerton Leigh, and is included in the former’s history of the county<sup>(3)</sup> (2 ed., i, 455). The chapel is represented in the vignette as standing on high ground and, between the elm trees on the north, it is asserted, there was an extensive view over the wide vale of the Mersey. On the west and south elevations of the chapel there were a number of rectangular and round-headed windows, and on the roof at the east end a bell turret or arched frame with a single bell. The register of this Church of St. John dates from 1817. This chapel, built in 1814, perished by fire in 1891, and the present building, the third to occupy the site, was erected in 1893. The tablet referred to above is built into the wall of the south porch.

Looking at the long history of both High Legh chapels, it is not surprising that as a result of the original 1408 chapel of the West Hall family falling into disuse about the middle of the seventeenth century, for a period of one hundred and fifty years or more the East Hall Chapel was the only place of worship in the village of High Legh. About the year 1814, however, the Leighs of West Hall, who had previously been attending the East Hall Chapel, decided to build a church of their own and to endow it, and this came to fruition in 1816 when the newly erected church was consecrated, and dedicated to St. John the Evangelist, thereby becoming the property of the Church of England as a chapel of ease under the

<sup>(1)</sup> Thomas Helsby writing in 1881 stated that the old chapel was of timber, and most picturesque. The bell hung on the branch of an immense sycamore, both of which have of course disappeared.

<sup>(2)</sup> To God Most High. On this very spot in the year of our Lord 1408, the piety of our ancestors built a small chapel which now has fallen into decay. When peace was restored in 1814 Egerton Leigh made it his care to renew this little sanctuary.

<sup>(3)</sup> Ormerod, *op. cit.*, 2nd ed., Vol. I, p. 455.

parish of Rostherne. The site, according to the stone inscription in the church, is the same as that upon which the West Hall private chapel of 1408 was erected.<sup>(1)</sup> As to the cause of the new building some insight is obtained from a local newspaper cutting of 1893 (in an account of the consecration of the third church on the site, after the eventual destruction by fire of the 1816 erection) in which the observer recorded that for many years "the parishioners attended the private chapel of the Leghs at East Hall close to", but that about 1814 "Mr. Egerton Leigh, grandfather of the present (1893) Mr. Egerton Leigh, suggested certain improvements in the Old Chapel (of East Hall) which had been declined, and Mr. Leigh then determined in the following year to rebuild St. John's Chapel as a thank offering for the peace of Waterloo. . . ." In the circumstances, it is almost impossible to believe that within a year of that date (1814) and while the church was still only in building, it was all but decided, to amalgamate the church with the chapel, to have the services turn and turn about, one "Minister" for the two with alternate presentations to the "Incumbency", and to give effect to the idea of having the East Hall Chapel consecrated. There was a great deal of correspondence about it at the time with the Bishop of Chester, with lawyers and others. Even counsel's opinion had to be taken to ascertain the exact status of the chapel. It appears that in 1815 a vacancy occurred in the East Hall chaplaincy, and George John Legh was anxious to appoint a Mr. Wood. Since he was in some way connected with another parish, the question of pluralities arose. Could Mr. Wood take up the chaplaincy and escape the penalties for non-residence in the case of a priest holding other preferment? This depended upon whether the chapel was donative, one of the exceptions allowed under the act, a consecrated chapel or merely domestic. Extraordinary as it may seem Mr. G. J. Legh apparently did not know which it was and eventually got his lawyers to put the following case before the counsel anonymously:—

In the year 1581 a Chapel of Ease was built by A.B. at his own expense in the Diocese of Exeter. A.B. and all the persons who have inherited the property of A.B. since his death have always appointed the Minister, fixed the amount of his stipend and paid the same, and the Bishop of the Diocese has never interfered in any manner whatsoever with these arrangements.

Your opinion is requested whether the Minister performing duty at the Chapel as the Minister thereof is exempt from the penalties of the Non-Residence Act, in case he should hold any other preferment.

What the ruling was may be gathered from the following letter, dated 31 July 1815, from the bishop to Mr. G. J. Legh.

<sup>(1)</sup> Col. Egerton Leigh informed Thomas Helsby that remains had been discovered during alterations in the then existing chapel which indicated that the site had been used for burials some centuries earlier (Ormerod, *op. cit.*, 2nd ed., Vol. I, p. 455). See above, p. 116.

"Maturer considerations confirm me in the opinion I gave you at High Legh. There is no sort of endowment, and no appointment of a Minister, and therefore your Chapel cannot be looked upon but as a mere private Domestic one. Of course therefore the Serving it cannot be an exemption from Residence or any Piece of Preferment. It would as I told you be in my opinion more regular and correct to have your Chapel licensed. I however shall certainly make no sort of objection to things going on as they have done for time immemorial."

This was the end of the idea of consecration and amalgamation. What it was that at the last moment put a stop to it there is nothing to show, but as everything was practically decided upon before the bishop's visit to High Legh to make final arrangements, it is obvious that something must have turned up at that visit to cause G. J. Legh to withdraw. Whatever the cause, it is something to be thankful for. Consecration before the Reformation when everyone was of the same religion was one thing, but afterwards another, and one can hardly imagine anyone being foolish enough to entertain the idea, involving as it did endowment and the definite handing over of the building to the Church authorities, when for all that G. J. Legh could tell his successor might be a Roman Catholic, who would find himself in the impossible position of having in his own "garden" a church, over which he had no control, and which, in the circumstances he could not use himself. The amalgamation of church and chapel without consecration might have had something in its favour, but it had many things against it which could only be got over by an incumbent after the heart of East Hall, and by one who was willing to see that the chapel services were not in substitution of those which in the ordinary course of events ought to have taken place in his own church. This was to be discovered a hundred years or so later in 1922, when, owing to the exigencies of the time, a sort of unofficial amalgamation was started and was in force when the present squire's father came into possession.<sup>(1)</sup> Under the scheme the chapel had come to be looked upon purely as part and parcel of the church, and for all the benefit the family derived from its services, it might never have existed. Evensong on Sundays was the usual routine Evensong which should have been held in the church.<sup>(2)</sup> The only redeeming feature in the arrangement was that, in the absence of a chaplain, it prevented the chapel from going into disuse.

As was to be expected, after the erection of St. John's, trouble was bound to arise, when the chapel had for so long been the sole place of worship in the village. The "competition of the chapel"<sup>(3)</sup> was complained of, not only as regards the care of souls, but also in the

<sup>(1)</sup> The arrangement was that, as St. John's Church had no Evening Service, the Incumbent should act as chaplain on Sunday evenings and take the service in the chapel so as to prevent its being closed altogether. The chapel already had its own organist and surpliced choir, and the incumbent received a fee of £100 a year for this service, which was carried on for about eight years.

<sup>(2)</sup> As the warden of the church once remarked, it was a very convenient arrangement having the Evening Service in the chapel, as there was no gas in St. John's. The owner of the chapel paid for the gas.

<sup>(3)</sup> One wonders why this was not thought of before the building of the church was decided upon. Surely if there were "competition", it came from the newly erected church, and not from the chapel.

duplication of services and the serious effect upon the church offertories. The greater part of the people continued to go to the "Old Chapel", and the East Hall family did not see why the advent of the church should bring about any alteration in their own services. The chapel continued therefore as usual. What happened immediately after the opening of the church is not known, but in 1851 there was trouble. A lengthy and heated correspondence waged about the visiting in the parish. Mr. Egerton Leigh and the curate of the church desired that it should be confined to St. John's, to the exclusion of the East Hall chaplain, for the purpose of obtaining a further augmentation of the living. Eventually the vicar of Rostherne maintained his absolute claim to the care of souls in the whole township, and objected to the chaplain of East Hall being deprived of his share of the parish work. Upon which the then incumbent declined, except in very urgent cases, to have anything to do with parochial visiting. A few years later, however, in 1854 the vicar of Rostherne offered to divide a sum of £30, which he received from Christ Church, Oxford, between the curate of the church and the private chaplain,<sup>(1)</sup> as an acknowledgement of the care of souls on the two estates, and it was then arranged that the curate should have the care of the West Hall tenants only, leaving the whole of the East Hall and the tenants of Lord Egerton to the chaplain.<sup>(2)</sup> In 1887 when the exchange of lands took place between the owners, the tenantry of West Hall became so small in number that it was mutually arranged to transfer the tenants of Lord Egerton to the curate, and to leave the chaplain with the East Hall people only, an arrangement which has continued more or less down to the present day. Today the freeholders take the place of the West Hall tenants who no longer exist.

On the night of 24 April 1891 the church was destroyed by fire just as some restoration work was being completed. This presented a golden opportunity for having the place rebuilt more in the centre of the village, and some distance away from the East Hall chapel, but all representations to this effect were useless. Mr. Egerton Leigh remained adamant that it should be on the same spot, and it was in due time re-erected and consecrated by the Bishop of Chester in 1893. Edmund Kirby of Liverpool was the architect. The patronage was originally vested in Mr. Egerton Leigh for a period of sixty years, thereafter to go to the vicar of Rostherne, who in the meantime retained the right to perform Divine Service in the church whenever he thought fit, and to reserve all emoluments and fees to the mother church of Rostherne. In 1818, in consideration of a further grant by Mr. Egerton Leigh, the curacy was vested in him and his heirs for ever, and in 1909 on the sale of the West Hall estate to the East Hall family, the appointment was transferred to them automatically.

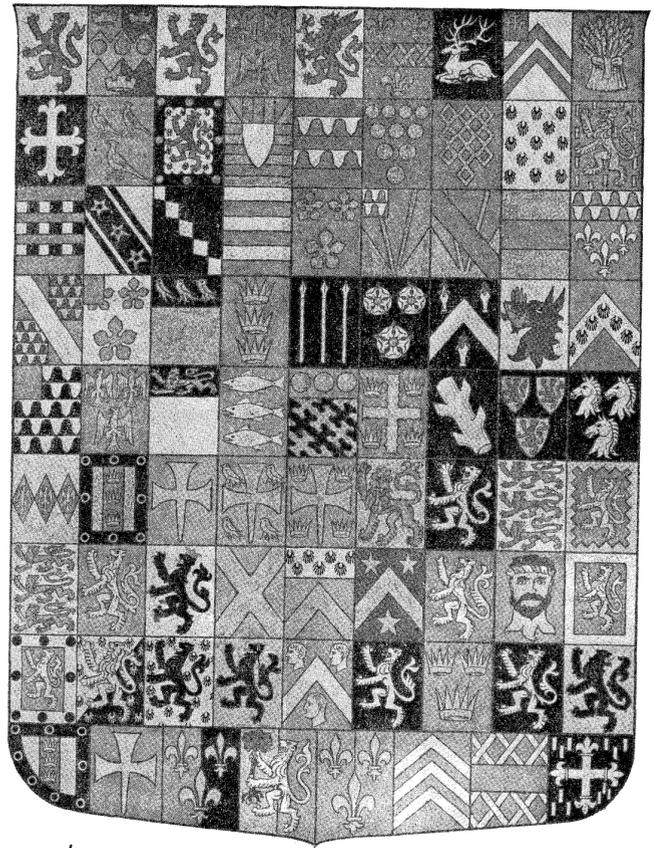
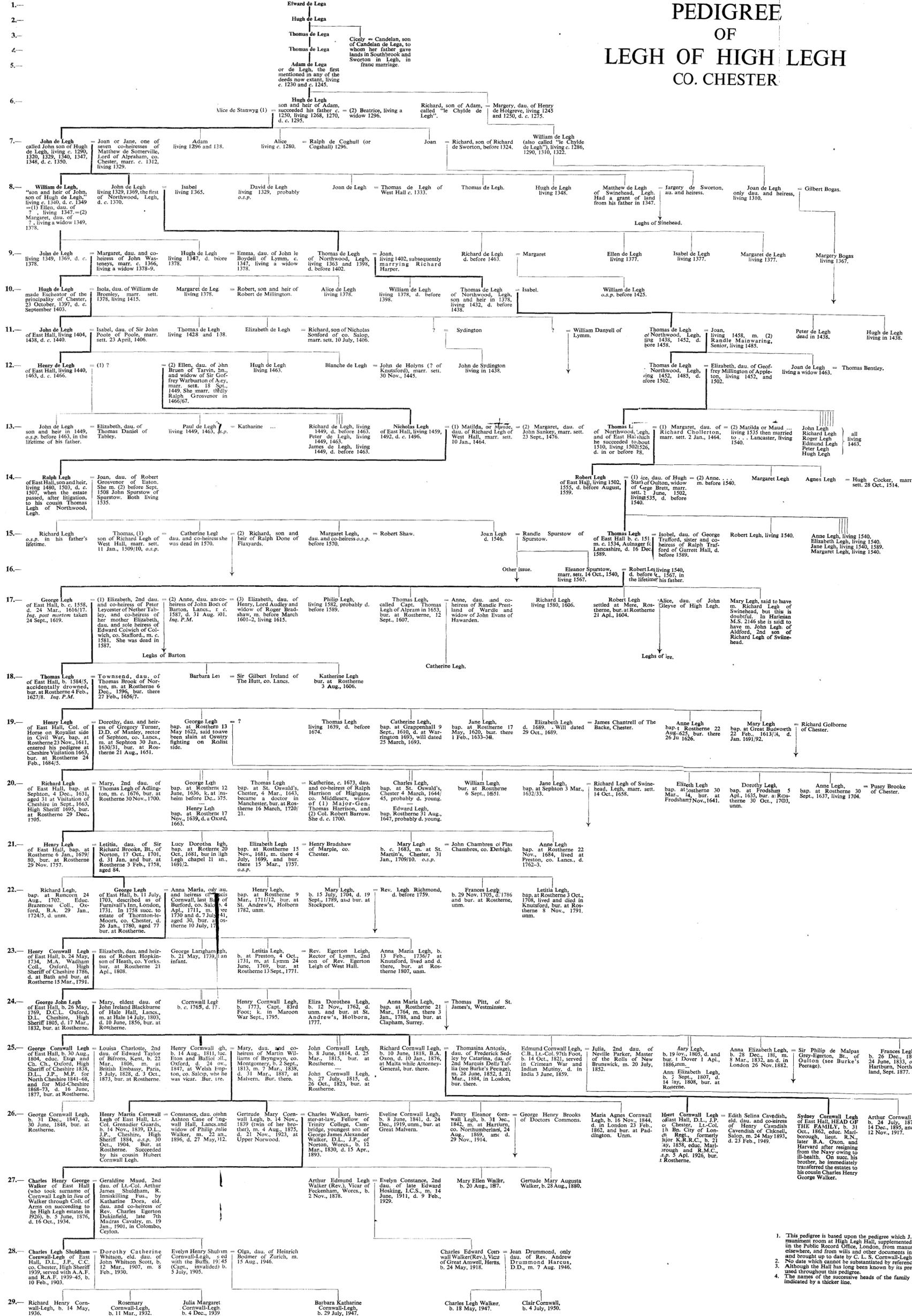
<sup>(1)</sup> This payment has long since ceased.

<sup>(2)</sup> This seems rather an unequal division, and must have made things very easy for the curate. At the date in question the West Hall estate represented approximately one quarter of the township only.





# PEDIGREE OF LEGH OF HIGH LEGH CO. CHESTER



ARMS OF LEGH

quartermen Walker (2), Legh (3), Alpraham (4), Trafford (5), Leycester (6), Downes (7), Moberley (8), Grosvenor (9), Pulford (10), Fesant (11), Cornwall (12), Mortimer (13), Say (14), Zouch (15), Rohan (16), Brittain (17), Beaumes (18), Barre (19), Lenthall (20), Lenthall (ancient) (21), Grey (22), Bardolph (23), Basset (24), Kiddle (25), Colvill (26), Waterville (27), Peverell (28), Driby (29), Wogan (30), Bell Mawr (31), Padern Peisradd (32), Canedda Wledig (33), Caradoc Vrechrifas (34), Pelinor (35), Gwys (36), Staunton (37), Hereford (38), Malfant (39), Pickton (40), Clement (41), Coel Godeboc (42), Gwyar (43), Vorigren (44), Brockwell (45), Mervyn Frith (46), Cadwallon (47), Cadwallader (48), Idwal Ywech (49), Conan Tyndaethwy (50), Roderic Mawr (51), Meuric ap Tynaval (52), Cadell (53), Hwyl Dda (54), Tudor Mawr (55), Rees Tudor (56), Griffith ap Rees (57), Langley (58), Griffith Lloyd (59), Cynwydd (60), Cadrod (61), Marchudd (62), Ynyr ap Cadfarth (63), Lyddocca (64), Tudor Trevor (65), Kendrick ap Rywallon (66), Hwfa ap Kendrick (67), Edfnyfed Vychan (68), Mathew (69), Gwyrdy (70), Edwyn (71), Gwathvody (72), Cadwallon (73), Cadwallader (74), Inyr (75), Morford (76), Howell (77), Justin ap Gwyrchan (78), Fleming (79), Norris (80)

### NOTES

1. This pedigree is based upon the pedigree which J. P. Earwaker constructed in 1894 from deeds still preserved in the muniment room at High Legh Hall, supplemented by extracts from the Cheshire Plea Rolls and Recognizance Rolls in the Public Record Office, London, from manuscripts in the British Museum, the Herald's College, London, and elsewhere, and from wills and other documents in the Probate Courts of Chester and London. It has been revised and brought up to date by C. L. S. Cornwall-Legh in 1950.
2. No date which cannot be substantiated by references in extant documents has been given.
3. Although the Hall has long been known by its present name of High Legh Hall, the old name of East Hall has been used throughout this pedigree.
4. The names of the successive heads of the family are printed in bold type, and the direct line of descent has been indicated by a thicker line.