



NOTES ON THE OLD HALLS OF WIRRAL.

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THE following notes on the old halls of the Hundred of Wirral do not in the least claim to be exhaustive or complete. The endeavour of the writer has been simply to collect in a convenient compass historical particulars worthy of record, together with a short account of the architecture of some of the older houses in this neighbourhood. The title of the paper is purposely vague, and he has availed himself of its elasticity, choosing, in perhaps a somewhat arbitrary way, those houses which seemed to him to have special claims on the readers' notice.

The Hundred of Wirral does not possess any stately mansion among its older buildings, but there are still a not inconsiderable number of houses which have features of historic and architectural interest, and it is in the hope that these may become more widely known to the large population living within walking distance of them all that these notes have been compiled.

In arranging the order in which they should be treated, a beginning has been made at the north-eastern corner of the Wirral, in the parish of Wallasey. The survey has next extended up the Mersey bank to Poole Hall, from thence to

Shotwick, and so down the Dee bank, finishing in West Kirby.

LEASOWE CASTLE.

To begin, then, in the parish of Wallasey. At the western extremity of the parish, almost on the shore of the sea, stands Leasowe Castle—formerly called New Hall.

There are many mysteries concerning our old houses in Wirral, but none more difficult of explanation than those raised by the existence of this house on the Wallasey Leasowes. Try to realize what this spot was like three hundred years ago. Literally miles from the nearest hamlet, on a perfectly level pasture, half a mile from a desolate wind-swept coast. The only possible approach, a sandy track leading from the road, which joined Moreton and Bidston. Add to this, that probably for four months out of the year the floods over the low-lying land effectually barred all ingress and egress, and you have a picture of desolateness and isolation that it would be hard to equal.

The writer can offer no explanation beyond repeating the tradition, which tells us that Ferdinando, the fifth Earl of Derby, built it for hunting and hawking. It is said that the date, 1593, is to be seen cut in the interior of the tower.¹

In shape the original building was peculiar. It consisted of a tall octagonal tower, four storeys high, with short wings projecting from each alternate facet, the whole dominated by a flat roof.

It has been suggested that this tower was used as a sort of grand-stand from which to view the races on the famous Wallasey race-course; but inasmuch as the finish of those races took place nearly two miles away, it is not a position that would commend itself to short-sighted onlookers.

¹ Information of Thomas Helsby-Acton, Esq.

From the Earls of Derby, the Castle—known as the New Hall, and afterwards as Mock-beggar Hall—passed, about 1602, to the Egertons of Oulton, and at the end of the last century, by purchase, to Mr. Lewis Boode, a West Indian planter. Mr. Boode's only daughter married, in 1821, the late Sir Edward Cust, Bart., whose grandson recently sold the property to a limited company for the purpose of its conversion into an hotel.

Sir Edward Cust added very considerably to the house, one room especially being of interest, as it was fitted with panels and other appointments from the Star Chamber at Westminster. These were purchased by Sir Edward Cust at the time of the demolition of the old Exchequer Buildings in 1836. Another room in the Castle was panelled with bog oak, taken from the so-called submerged forest at Meols.

On the level pasture land between the Castle and the village, races appear to have been run from a very early date. It has indeed been asserted that Wallasey was the earliest regular racecourse in the kingdom. Perhaps this is claiming too much, but it certainly was among the earliest. In 1622 we have a definite reference to it in Webb's *Itinerary of Cheshire*, where he speaks of those "fair lands or plains upon the shore of the sea, which for the fitness for such a purpose, allure the gentlemen and others oft to appoint great matches and venture no small sums in trying the swiftness of their horses." From time to time throughout the seventeenth century we find references to the Wallasey races, which always show it as one of the leading meetings of the county, if not in the North of England.² In 1682, the spot was rendered famous by a visit from the ill-fated Duke of

² "An old Racing Stable at Wallasey," by R. D. Radcliffe, M.A., F.S.A., *Trans. Hist. Soc. of Lanc. and Chesh.*, vol. xlv, p. 141.

Monmouth, while on a tour through the northern counties in search of popularity. The first race, which the Duke won, riding his own horse, was for £60, a considerable sum in those days. After this, the Duke offered to race a certain Mr. Cutts of Cambridgeshire, on foot, first stripped and afterwards in his boots, both of which races he won.

A horse race was a very serious affair both for horse and rider at this time, as the course was usually a very long one. At Wallasey it seems to have extended for nearly five miles, running as it did from the village, out towards the Castle and back again, finishing near the present railway station. And as the races were run in heats, and a win could only be obtained by the first horse leading throughout the last 240 yards, it sometimes happened that the distance had to be traversed two or even three times. When all this is considered, our respect for the power of endurance shown by the Duke on this occasion is certainly enhanced.

Forty years later the popularity of Wallasey had so far increased, that it is said the most considerable stake in the kingdom was run for over this course. The names of the winners will give us some idea of the importance of the event. We find among them the Duke of Devonshire winning in 1725, Lord Gower in 1723 and 1730, the Duke of Ancaster in 1728, and Sir Richard Grosvenor in 1724, 1726, and 1727. About 1732 the more important events were discontinued, though for some years afterwards a race was run at Newmarket called "The Wallasey Stakes."

But if the great race was no longer run on the Leasowes, other events took place there during the latter half of the eighteenth century, as is evident from some inscriptions cut on the door of the old racing stable in Wallasey village, recently demolished. Within the circle of a horse shoe the

inscription—"Black Slave won 200 guineas at "Wallazey, 1778," was legible a few years ago, also, "Smiling Molly won 50 guineas at Walazey, "1770."

This last relic of an ancient habitat of the "sport of Kings" was destroyed five years ago, to make way for several rows of brick and mortar abominations, usually known as "desirable sub-urban villas."

WALLASEY AND SEACOMBE HALLS.

In mediæval times there were several families of gentle rank in the parish of Wallasey, chief among them being the Meolses, of Great Meols and afterwards of Wallasey. It is not clear why this family left its ancient seat near Hoylake and moved up to the rock-land of Wallasey, but in the year 1350, in reply to an enquiry from the King, a report was made that the "site" of the manor-house of Great Meols was of no value. From this it may be inferred that some sinking of the ground or drifting of the sand had rendered the Meols property unsuitable for residence, and it is not improbable that from this occurrence dates the move to Wallasey. The Meolses held their property there under the Priory of Birkenhead, and lived close to the Church, in a fine old Hall, which was pulled down in 1862 by the Rector.³

Among the other possessions of the Meols family, they seem to have held a good deal of land in Seacombe, and 200 yards from the ferry still stands, though in the midst of most sordid surroundings, the old dower house of the Meols family.⁴

³ For a view of a portion of this old Hall, see vol. xlv of the *Trans. Hist. Soc. of Lanc. and Chesh.*, frontispiece.

⁴ Over the door is a door-plate, with the initials and date, W. P. M. 1684. The initials, no doubt, represent Philip Wilson and Margaret, his wife. Margaret being one of the daughters of Thomas Meols of Wallasey, Esquire. The house is still known as Wheatland House.

Before modern life, in the shape of steam-boats and engines, invaded the district, this house must have been a charming spot, crowning the top of the bank which falls rapidly to the Mersey, and commanding a view of the majestic river and the busy seaport on the opposite bank. To-day, standing in the wreck of the old orchard, while a few dejected hens peck drearily at imaginary crumbs, and the rain drips steadily into filthy puddles by the door, one almost feels that it would be a blessing if a speculative builder would put the poor old house out of its misery and build a nice new red shop.

Let us now retrace our steps somewhat, and passing the comfortable-looking house of Mr. William Bird, of Poulton, yeoman, built in 1621, as the door-plate tells us, cross the salt marsh which used to lie between Wallasey and Bidston, threaded now though it be by numerous lines of railway.

BIDSTON.

In Bidston Hall we have a good specimen of the style of architecture in vogue at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries. The Hall, as it at present stands, has a rather stunted appearance, due to the fact that, in 1818, the four gable ends which faced westward were taken down, and a single roof-ridge running north and south substituted. The gateway is rather an effective piece of work. A popular tradition in the village has it that the ornaments over the gate are intended to represent a punch-bowl and two decanters, but that an accident happened to the punch-bowl and it has never been replaced. Unfortunately, however, Mr. Vyner possesses a drawing made in 1665, in which the third ornament is complete, and this shews it to be simply another

finial, similar in character to those still remaining.⁵ The house was probably built in 1620 to 1622, by William Earl of Derby, the wandering Earl, as he is popularly called. The estate was sold during the Commonwealth to William Steele, a celebrated lawyer, who subsequently became Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer and Chancellor of Ireland. Steele sold the property in 1662 to Lord Kingston, an Irish peer, who borrowed money upon it on mortgage from Sir Robert Vyner, the famous London banker. This mortgage was eventually foreclosed, and the estate consequently passed into the possession of the Vyner family, in whose hands it has since remained. The story of its having been lost and won on an ace of clubs is pure fiction.⁶

The old deer-park wall is still standing in some places, and is of great height and thickness, being about four feet thick at the base, and standing over six feet in height. This self-same wall is referred to in nearly all the leases of the Hall, back to the earliest existing one in 1609, where it is called "the great ston wall."

The antiquity of the wall may be even greater than this, as a curious tradition in the village records the fact that its builders only received a wage of one penny a day. The name it is popularly known by among the older villagers is "The Penny-a-day Dyke." If this story be true, it takes us back a very long way. To arrive at a period when such low wages were paid as a penny a day for dykers, we must hark back to the fourteenth century. It is interesting to note, in this

⁵ See "Notes on the Ancient Parish of Bidston," by W. F. Irvine, vol. xlv *Trans. Hist. Soc. of Lanc. and Chesh.*, p. 33.

⁶ The origin of this story is probably due to the fact that an old summer house used to stand on the rising land at the back of the Hall, built in the shape of an ace of clubs, a not uncommon conceit of the period (seventeenth century). Mr. Vyner's new house is almost on the site of the summer house, and is, therefore, called "Club House."

connection, that in 1408 a grant is recorded from the King to two Liverpool men, who held the manor of Bidston from the Stanleys, of the right to em-park "with palings, wall, ditch or hedge, 80 acres "of their demesne, adjacent to their Manor of "Bidston." The ground enclosed by this old wall is just 80 Cheshire acres. If, as is very probable, this is the same structure, it speaks well for the workmanship of those old wall-builders, underpaid though they may have been. How many walls, one wonders, built to-day at fifty times the cost, will be standing in Wirral 500 years hence!

UPTON.

Across the fields from Bidston lay the old Hall of Upton, a possession of the family of Bold until the seventeenth century. It was pulled down, however, in the early part of the last century, and no drawing or plan seems to exist to show us its semblance. The site is occupied by the Convent school.

TRANMERE.

More fortunate, in some respects, is Tranmere. Though the old Hall shared a fate similar to that of Upton, it was not before good drawings of the building had been made by the late Mr. Joseph Mayer, the founder of the Mayer Museum at Bebington.⁷

This house seems to have been built in 1614, by George Langford of Tranmere, though its general history is rather obscure. When it was pulled down, some interesting quarrels of glass were taken from the windows, representing soldiers of the time of James I, with instructions as to the

⁷ See "Tranmere Hall," by Joseph Mayer, *Trans. Hist. Soc. of Lanc. and Chesh.*, vol. iii, p. 107.

use of arms, as well as several four-line verses in a lighter vein.

In the first, which may serve as an example, is a soldier in a buff jacket wearing a hat with a plume of feathers; he carries a sword and holds in his hand a musket, with a rest lying alongside the stock of the piece. He is evidently examining the priming, and the picture is inscribed, "Blow your panne." Below this come four lines, which do not, however, appear to have any reference to the soldier:—

This round we laughe, we drink, we eate,
Es tells you that we wante noe meate.
Al sorrow is in good liquor drownde
As circle soth the cupps goe round.

These are now in the possession of the Trustees of the Mayer Museum.

PRENTON.

From Tranmere we cross to Prenton. The Hall has no specially interesting features left, though it once housed an interesting family, the Hockenhulls of Prenton, a branch of the Hockenhulls of Hockenhull, whom we shall meet again when we reach Shotwick.

The Hockenhulls came into possession of this property about the reign of Henry VIII, by marriage with an heiress of the name of Gleave, whose ancestor had obtained it by marriage with the heiress of the original family of Prenton of Prenton.

An example of the wonderful accuracy of the great Domesday Survey is to be seen in this township. In the account given in Domesday Book, mention is made of a mill which supplies the Hall, no doubt the predecessor of this very building. Now in Domesday Book a mill always means a water-mill, as wind-mills were not invented at the time. At first sight it seemed

highly improbable that a water-mill could ever have existed in this township, and yet, on a careful search being made, hidden away in a dingle, a few hundred yards from the Hall, were found the remains of a mill dam which, when complete, must have blocked the end of a little valley—through which still runs a small stream—and formed a fine sheet of water. It is a curious fact that this was the only mill in the whole Hundred of Wirral at the time of the Domesday Survey, with the exception of the famous one on Bromborough Pool.

STORETON.

Our way from Prenton to Storeton lies along an ancient lane, popularly called the Monk's Stepping Stones, also sometimes called the Roman Road. Both names are quite misleading. That an occasional monk may have stepped along these stones is quite probable, and there can be little doubt that sometimes a stray Roman may have used this very lane nearly two thousand years ago, but it has no more right to either name than any other lane in the neighbourhood. These stones were probably placed in their present position some time in the middle ages, just as stones were put in any miry spot, when the locality could afford it, in other parts of the country. They were mainly used by the heavily-laden pack horses, that carried merchandise from village to village in the days before wheeled traffic became possible.

The fanciful name of the Monk's Stepping Stones probably arose through a misconception as to the origin of Storeton Hall. This interesting house has frequently been mistaken for an ecclesiastical building, because the west window is pointed. As a matter of fact this particular arch is nothing more than a bedroom window.

Storeton Hall has special claims on our interest as the home of the undivided house of Stanley. Architecturally it is a very good specimen of a style of building prevalent during the fourteenth century. Roughly speaking, the original structure appears to have been in the shape of a letter H, and a portion of one down stroke and one wall of the cross piece still remain.

On examining the building from the south-west corner, we see the point where the wall, which formed the western side of the great hall, joined the north wing. This has since been pulled down, and the east wall of the great hall has been used as a west wall to some later farm buildings. To be more clear: the *interior* of the east wall of the great hall is now the *exterior* of a cow-house, and the original exterior of it, consequently, is now to be seen in the interior of this later building. On what is now the inside of a built-up doorway can still be seen the finely-wrought hood-moulding of the original entrance.

It is nearly certain that the Hall was built about the year 1360, by William de Stanley, whose great-grandfather, another William de Stanley, some eighty years before, had become possessed of the wardenship of the forest of Wirral and wide estates there by his marriage with Joan, daughter of Sir Philip de Bamville of Storeton. This William, who built Storeton Hall, was the father of Sir William de Stanley, Kt., who married the heiress of Sir William de Hooton, and through her obtained that township, where he subsequently settled on a property which, for nearly five centuries, continued identified with the name of Stanley.

This William had also a second son, Sir John Stanley, who married Isabella, daughter and heiress of Sir Thomas de Lathom, from whom descended the illustrious houses of Stanley of Knowsley,

ennobled as Earls of Derby, and Stanley of Alderley, more recently raised to the peerage as Barons of that place.

Thus we have in Storeton the cradle of a race of men who, throughout the last five hundred years, have done much to mould the destiny of England, and have given us statesmen, scholars, diplomatists, and soldiers.

Not less interesting is the quaint little romance that surrounds the acquisition of this property by the Stanleys. Towards the end of the thirteenth century the manor of Storeton, which carried with it the head forestership of Wirral, was in the possession of one Sir Philip de Bamville, who had no sons and only three daughters, Joan, aged 18, Ellen, aged 7, and Agnes, aged 6. These three daughters, no doubt, were regarded as very desirable matches by many of the surrounding gentry, and their father evidently intended making the best of his right to gift his daughters' hands. But even in those days daughters were not always docile, as the following story will show, which may be quoted in words translated from the ancient document still preserved at the Public Record Office in London. It is the reply to an enquiry taken by the King's Escheator for Cheshire in 1284, and is given on oath by several local men. The jurors say that on the 27th of September, 1282, Philip de Bamville, with his wife and family, was at a banquet given by Master John de Stanley, on which occasion Joan, suspecting that her father intended to marry her to her stepmother's son, and not being herself at all desirous of such a match, took means to avoid it by repairing with William Stanley to Astbury Church, where marriage was contracted between them by the utterance of the following mutual promise: he saying, "Joan, I plight thee my troth to
"take and hold thee as my lawful wife unto my

“life’s end;” and she replying, “I, Joan, take thee, William, as my lawful husband.” The witnesses to this verbal contract being Adam de Hoton and Dawe de Coupeland.

When the property of Storeton and the Hooton estates came to be sold, in 1848, it is said that there were no title deeds of any kind, the forester’s horn being the only outward and visible sign of the Stanleys’ right to the broad acres with which they had so sadly to part.

BROMBOROUGH.

Storeton is in the ancient parish of Bebington, so passing through Bebington village, where the hall does not call for special mention, we come to Bromborough.

Bromborough, at an early date, seems to have been the most important centre in the Hundred. At the time of the Domesday survey, under the name of Eastham, it was by far the largest manor in the peninsula, being rated at nearly a quarter of the whole value of the Hundred.⁸ It possessed jurisdiction over a very large tract of land, indeed over nearly the whole of the eastern side of the peninsula, and included Saughall Massey, Moreton, Bidston, Claughton, Birkenhead, Oxton, Tranmere, part of Bebington, the township we now call Eastham, Brimstage, Whitby, and possibly one or two other villages. All these important townships owed suit to the parent manor of Bromborough, and consequently the Court-house there, as it is still called, must have been a very important place. The whole manor had belonged, in English times, to the ill-fated Earl Edwin, and at the Conquest was retained by the Earl of Chester himself. Earl Hugh seems at once to have begun portioning it

⁸ See “Cheshire in Domesday Book,” by J. Brownbill, vol. xlv *Trans Hist. Soc. of Lanc. and Chesh.*

out among his knights, so that in a very few years he only had the lands of the townships of Bromborough and Eastham left, and these his successor Randle gave to the Monastery of St. Werburgh for the good of his soul, or, as he expressed it, to make up to the monastery for the wrongs which he had done it. At the dissolution of the religious houses, Bromborough formed part of the endowment of the new see of Chester, and one hundred years later we find the Court-house in the hands of the Hardwares, who held it on rent from the Dean and Chapter.

The Hardwares were a family who rose to an honourable position in the county through success in trade in the city of Chester. One of them appears to have built the house, as we see it, about the end of the seventeenth century. They were leading Puritans and afterwards Nonconformists. It will be remembered that Matthew Henry, the Commentator, married one of the daughters of Samuel Hardware, of Bromborough Court. The shell of the house is substantially original, but the windows have been modernized, as also the interior, which is now converted into two houses. Several instances occur of so-called seditious meetings being held in this house, and action was taken before the Bishop's Court, at Chester, against Nonconformists for attending meetings at Bromborough Court, especially to listen to the preaching of Harrison, the famous Puritan preacher who was ejected from Chester Cathedral in 1662.

Among the many points of interest at Bromborough may be mentioned its wells, one of which is said to have petrifying qualities. A well of special sanctity is known as St. Patrick's well, and is said to have been the site of some early baptisms by that famous Irish saint.

BRIMSTAGE.

Bromborough had one peculiarity among Wirral parishes, and that is that it consisted of two detached portions some distance apart; the township of Bromborough being one, and the township of Brimstage the other.

In the latter village stands the building which, next to Storeton Hall, can lay claim to the greatest antiquity in the Hundred. Brimstage Hall itself is of no very great age, but attached to it is an ancient tower of four storeys, which appears to have been built by Sir Hugh de Hulse, of Brimstage, about the year 1400. The lowest room in the tower has a stone groined roof, and is believed to have been a domestic chapel. From the Hulses the property descended, through the Troutbecks of Dunham, to the family of Talbot, whose present representative is the Earl of Shrewsbury.

HOOTON.

From Brimstage we journey to Hooton, which, for nearly five centuries, was the most important house in the Hundred.

The old Hall, taken down in 1778, must have been a very interesting and striking building. A large portion of it was of the usual Cheshire timber and plaster work, though one wing was of stone, and the whole was dominated by a remarkably slender tower of great height, which was built under a special license from the King in 1488. The Hall which took the place of this in 1778, was from the designs of Wyatt, and at the time was considered, in the words of Mr. Ormerod, "the most elegant building of the kind which the county" could produce. The present house was very much enlarged by the late Mr. Naylor, who

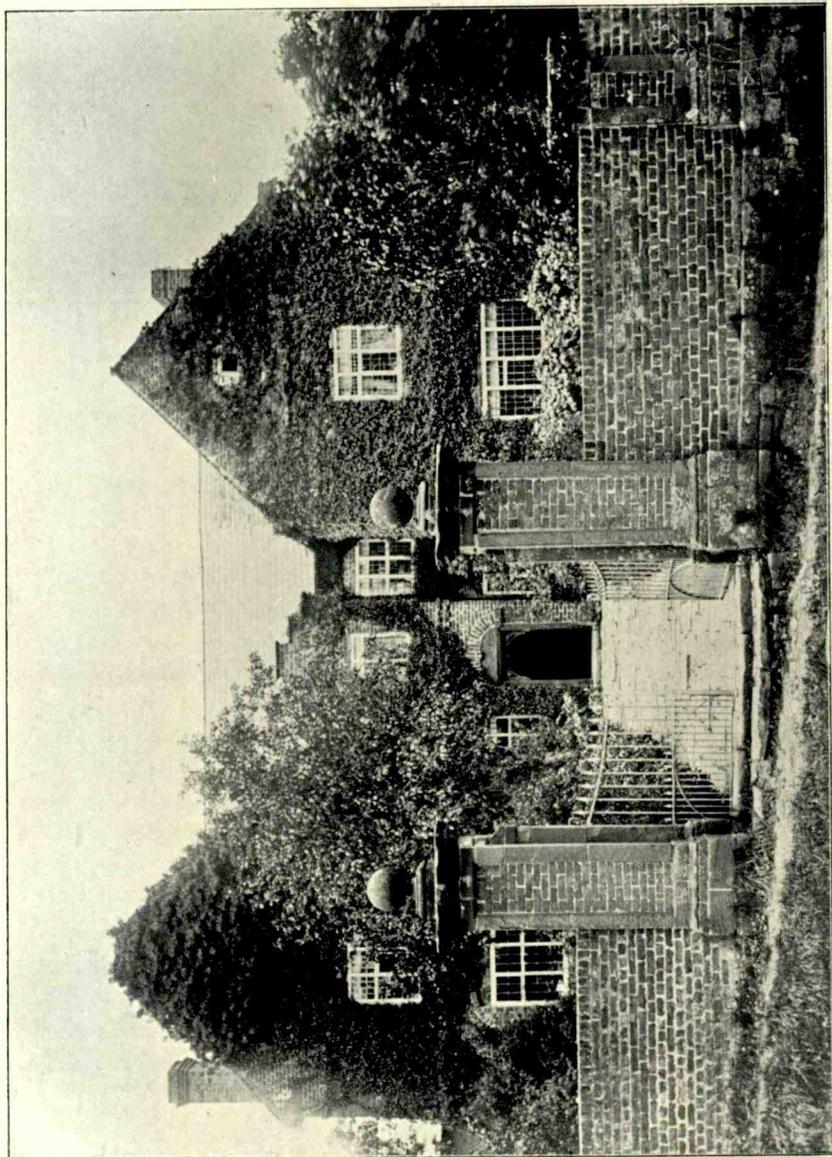
bought it in 1848. It has recently been leased to the Hooton Park Steeplechase and Racecourse Company Limited.

Of the family of Stanley mention has already been made under Storeton. The pitiful story of the dissipation of this truly splendid patrimony, there is no need to tell; but we cannot think without regret of this ancient race, who for centuries were virtual kings in Wirral, and we mourn their fall especially when we see the gently rolling park lands rented by a limited company, while down the avenues, heavy with historic memories, we hear the raucous yell of the betting tout, and see placards of a race-meeting posted on the trunk of an oak tree that heard Eastham bells ring-in King Charles the Second.

POOLE.

Poole Hall, immediately beyond Hooton, on the banks of the Mersey, as we pass towards Chester, is one of the most picturesque houses in the county. The south and east fronts are built of a soft sandstone, now grey with age; while on the other sides are some remains of timber and plaster work, apparently portions of an earlier building. Ormerod suggests that the stone part of the house was built about 1540; and this is not improbable, though it may be thirty or forty years later than this. The south front, or, to be more accurate, the south-east front, shelters what must have been a very charming old-fashioned garden, in which a picturesque sundial still stands to witness to its former graces.

The heavy embattled porch on the east side covers a massive oaken door, and gives access to a spacious hall—into which open the dining-room and other rooms, including the kitchen, where



SHOTWICK HALL, CHESHIRE

a modern range fills up what used to be a capacious ingle-nook.

Each step of the stairs is composed of a massive square block of oak, which gives us some idea of the wealth of building materials available when this structure was raised.

The Pooles, like their neighbours, the Stanleys, long remained devoted adherents to the old faith, and during the reign of Queen Elizabeth suffered much as popish recusants, to use the official phrase. In one of the turrets may still be seen the remains of the chapel, which was there set up.

SHOTWICK.

Shotwick Hall appears to have been built in 1662, by Joseph Hockenhull of Hockenhull and Shotwick, the representative of a very ancient Cheshire family of minor gentry. He was lord of the manor of Shotwick, an ancestor of his having married a Shotwick heiress. The site of the Hall, which was in use until the building of this present house, is still to be seen close to the vicarage.

The Hockenhulls appear to have lived mainly at Hockenhull, in Tarvin parish, Shotwick being usually occupied by a second son. In the room on the right of the door as one enters the house is an inscription in plaster, "J. H. 1662" which means Joseph Hockenhull and Elizabeth his wife, the date probably being that of the building of the house; while, between the two initials and the date, is a shield of arms incorrectly emblazoned, evidently meant for the coat armour of the families of Shotwick and Hockenhull.⁹ This coat of the Hockenhulls is a curious one, being simply an

⁹ The coat, as it stands, is:—Quarterly: in the first and fourth quarters a cross plain; in the second and third an ass's head erased. Crest, an animal's head [? a buck's] erased, pierced with an arrow barbed and flecked.

ass's head—one wonders who selected such a curious adornment.

A predecessor of this Joseph Hockenhull has left a will, and from it we get some idea of the comparatively primitive ménage of a lesser Elizabethan squire. His legacy to his sorrowing wife consisted of "3 coverlettes, 2 payre of shets, 2 " fether beddes, one mattriss, 4 potengers of pewter " and four chargers, 2 kynes, one brasse potte, " one pan, her weryng clothes and one corrall " payre of beydes, and twenty poundes in money." He evidently attached great importance to the "corrall payre of beydes," as he leaves instructions that his wife is only to have the use of them until their eldest daughter is married, when she is to become the possessor; and in the event of the eldest daughter's death, they are to descend to the next daughter, and so on down to the youngest daughter.¹⁰

In a plea made in a case in the year 1499, John Hockenhull of Shotwick makes various claims as to his rights and privileges on his manor, among them being his right to take all fish of every kind in the waters of the Dee opposite Shotwick, with the exception of whale, sturgeon, and thirlehead.¹¹ These latter he admits he is obliged to take to Chester Castle for the Earl's use. No one has discovered, so far, among the Chester Castle documents any returns as to the number of whales rendered yearly.

PUDDINGTON.

From Shotwick we pass to Puddington, in some ways perhaps the most interesting of the old Halls

¹⁰ *Vide* will of Ralph Hockenhull of Shotwick, "Lanc. and Chesh. Wills," edited by W. F. Irvine, *Record Soc. Lanc. and Chesh.*, vol. xxx.

¹¹ Thirlehead = porpoise.

of Wirral. Puddington was given at the time of the Conquest to Hamon de Massey, one of the Earl's most trusted followers. A younger son of this house eventually settled there, and the property remained in the possession of his direct descendants until the beginning of last century. Throughout the middle ages no body of Cheshire archers bound for the wars seemed complete without a Massey of Puddington; and in most of the battles of the French wars we find one at least of the family present.

A portion of the old Hall still remains, though a good deal of it has been re-cased in brick within the last two hundred years. Three sides of what seems to have been a quadrangular building are standing, and probably date from the year 1490. The house was originally moated, and two sides of the moat still remain, while the other two are clearly traceable. Entrance to the quadrangle was by an archway on the north side of the house, which was approached by a drawbridge. In the interior of the courtyard some traces are still to be seen of an open gallery, similar to the one at Agecroft Hall, near Pendleton. An interesting feature in the house is the immense chimney stack, leading up from the kitchen, built in the narrow brick, such as was used in the sixteenth century. It is said that in this stack a secret chamber was found some years ago. Many of the oak principals in the roof are of immense size and thickness.

Like nearly all the Wirral families, the Masseys, at the time of the Reformation, remained steadfast in the faith of their forefathers, and seem always to have continued not only staunch but most conscientious followers of the old way.

In a curious topical hunting song,¹² written in 1615, which is full of references to Wirral people,

¹² *Wirral Notes and Queries*, vol. ii, p. 19, Sanders and Irvine.

a hare—who is the subject of the song—tells her experience as she coursed along the Dee shore, from Thurstaston to Chester. After leaving Gayton, she tells how she went—

O'er Burton Hill to Puddington Hall—
 There would she be bould to call—
 And [there] she hoped that she might pass,
 For he was att service, and she was at Mass.
 The hare did shoute as shee went bye,
 And out they came with a gallant cry.
 The hare did think that the world went round:
 Four huntinge hornes at once did sounde.
 She found them pastyme for a whyle,
 In a league she doubled, they lost a mile.
 To Shotwicke Parke the hare she crost,
 And then the hounds the game had lost.

Considering that this was written in 1615, when the most stringent laws were in force against Romish practices, it shows at least that, in the popular mind, Sir William and Lady Massey were not afraid to avow their religious views.

Sir William was an old man when the Civil War broke out, but together with many of the Royalist gentry he retired to Chester, leaving Puddington Hall garrisoned for the King, and remained in Chester until its fall. While besieged in the city, it seems that the Parliamentary soldiers captured Puddington and burnt a large portion of it. Sir William Massey, in his petition to the Committee for Compounding,¹³ estimates the damage at £1000, and says that forty bays of building were burnt. For his devotion to the Royal cause he was fined £1414, an enormous sum in those days, equal to about £12,000 of our money.

His son, Edward Massey, followed in his father's footsteps, and like many of the Roman Catholics of the wealthier classes, supported a priest in his own house. This priest was a Lancashire man named

¹³ *Cheshire Sheaf*, Series III, vol. i, p. 114, Sanders and Irvine.

John Pleasington, and came from near Garstang. Edward Massey, in his will dated 7th September, 1671, leaves £5 to Mr. John Peasington, as he calls him, without describing his occupation. Pleasington appears to have been an inoffensive person, and to have lived on kindly terms with most of those with whom he came in contact, until the dreadful storm of the Popish Plot broke over the country, in 1678. When this "hellish and "damnable" conspiracy, as the hysterical House of Commons called it, was proclaimed, which existed solely in the disordered and malignant imaginations of Titus Oates and his creatures, the feeling in the country ran so high that no priest's life was safe. There can be little doubt that the secret chamber in the chimney stack at Puddington, to which reference has just been made, was frequently in use at this time. Pleasington, about this period, incurred the anger of some neighbours by opposing a marriage between one of his flock and a Protestant gentleman, with the result that information was laid against him as a Romish priest. He was seized at Puddington in the following spring, carried to Chester, tried, found guilty, and sentenced to death. He was kept in Chester Castle for nine weeks, and on the 19th July, 1679, drawn on a hurdle to the place of execution outside the city, and after a pathetic speech met his end with courage. Of the three witnesses who gave evidence against him, one was crushed to death by an accident a few days before the execution; another, we are told, died in a pigsty; while the third lingered away in a state of misery and anguish.¹⁴

Edward Massey's will, from which quotation has just been made, is an interesting document, while the inventory of goods which accompanies it is especially so. It shows us a house, with 23 or 24

¹⁴ *Cheshire Sheaf*, Series III, vol. iii, p. 13, Sanders and Irvine.

rooms, if not more, and reveals the fact that various relatives, besides Edward Massey's own family, occupied apartments there. We read of "old Mr. Richard's chamber," "Mr. Palliser's chamber," "George Antonie's chamber," "My Lady Sen John's chamber," "the Doctor's chamber," and several others. The goods enumerated as furnishing the parlour do not show a very high state of domestic comfort. This room seems to have contained "twenty chaires, a carpet of turkie work, two table cloths of Kittermuster, a fire shovel, and a payre of tonges," the whole valued at £6. One wonders what they used instead of tables! His total goods were valued at £457 10s. 1d.

The most fascinating figure in the history of the Massey family is undoubtedly this man's son, William. A devout Catholic, we meet with him constantly in the pages of Bishop Cartwright's diary.¹⁵ From the entries in this interesting document, William Massey seems to have been of a proselytizing disposition. His desire to comfort and cheer his fellow religionists sometimes led him into difficulties. We learn from the diary that Lady Grosvenor, who was an earnest Catholic, corresponded with him a good deal, much to the annoyance of Sir Thomas Grosvenor, who was a staunch Protestant, and frequent quarrels resulted; and in the end a *modus vivendi* was arrived at, through the intervention of the Bishop. The terms were these:—There was to be no public discourse of religion when Mr. Massey came to Eaton, but my lady was to be permitted to enjoy hers in private, she, however, not writing to Mr. Massey without showing it to her husband. This Lady Grosvenor was Mary

¹⁵ *Diary of Bishop Cartwright*, Camden Society.

Davies, the heiress, who brought so many broad acres in the city of Westminster to the Grosvenor family, which have since yielded such a golden harvest to their owners. She seems to have had a troubled life, and eventually went out of her mind and died in very sad circumstances.

But to return from this digression. Mr. Massey never married,¹⁶ and is said to have thrown all his energies into politics and religion. In 1683, during the disturbances which followed the discovery of the Rye House Plot, he appears to have come in for a good deal of suspicion, as among Lord Kilmorey's papers we find mention of a writ being issued to search the house of Mr. Massey, of Puddington, for concealed arms.¹⁷ His great opportunity came, however, in 1715, when the rising took place in Lancashire in favour of the Pretender. This rising never had in it the elements of success, and the way in which the Catholic gentry of Lancashire and Cheshire threw themselves into it does more credit to their courage than their judgment. William Massey was present at most of the secret Jacobite meetings in South-west Lancashire before the coming of the Pretender, and when the Highland army swept over the Border and the Pretender was proclaimed King at Lancaster, William Massey hastened to join his standard. The triumph was short-lived, and on the 14th November, when the rebel army surrendered at Preston, William Massey is said by tradition to have escaped in the early morning on a favourite horse, and ridden

¹⁶ It will be noticed that, in this account, the writer has departed from the usually accepted pedigree, printed in Ormerod (Helsby's edition), vol. ii, p. 591. In that pedigree, the William Massey—son of Edward Massey, died 1674—is made to marry, and is credited with a son William, who died unmarried in 1716. The writer believes that there was only one William, namely, the son of Edward, and that he died unmarried, or, at all events, without issue, in 1716.

¹⁷ *Hist. MS. Com.*, 10th Report, App. iv, p. 363.

southward for his life. Tradition tells how he rode without slacking rein until he reached Speke Hall, and knowing that the ferry at Runcorn was closely watched, he tried the desperate course of swimming the Mersey between Speke and Hooton, a distance of three miles.¹⁸ According to a contemporary plan, even if he chanced on a spring tide, at dead low water, he would have to swim his horse at two channels, each half-a-mile wide, in one of which the depth was two fathoms and in the other one fathom. From Hooton he is said to have pushed on without a pause to Puddington Hall, having ridden over forty-five miles without a break, a wonderful performance for a man of nearly 60 years of age. The faithful horse, that had carried its master so bravely, fell dead as it was being led into the stable, being buried where it lay, and three broad flagstones still mark the spot, a spot held sacred to this day, no tenant being permitted to move these stones, whatever other changes he may work. William Massey is said to have hurried up to his room and flung himself into bed, calling the family doctor to his bedside to complete the effort at concealment, as the agents of the law, coming from Chester, thundered at the door of Puddington Hall. The efforts, however, were unavailing; he was seized, as Father Pleasington had been thirty years before, and thrown into the noisome cells at Chester Castle. Here he lingered for a few months, until his death in the following February, almost exactly three months from the date of the surrender of Preston.

¹⁸ It has been pointed out that Mr. Massey might have crossed the Mersey at Hale ford, but the tradition specially mentions that he emerged at Hooton. Had he crossed from Hale, the landing would have taken place at Frodsham, if not at Weston. In either case, a long and difficult ride would be necessary over the Frodsham and Stanlow marshes. It is said that formerly a ford existed at Oglet, beyond Speke, which was in use within the memory of man. This is more probably the course he adopted.

A little time ago, the writer had in his hands the tattered remnants of the will which William Massey drew up a week before his death. His signature is a pitiful scrawl, speaking eloquently to the truth of the preamble, where he describes himself as "sick and weak in body, though of sound mind and memory." Attached to the will is a codicil, which he made the day following, but here are further signs of his weakness, as he has only strength to make a shaky cross, against which the attorney has written, "the letters of the said William Massey."

William Massey had never married, and so by his will he left Puddington and some other real estate to his little godson, Thomas Stanley, son of Sir Richard Stanley of Hooton, an infant of only a few weeks. When this Thomas grew up, he joined the Society of Jesus, and so assigned Puddington to his elder brother John, who assumed the name of Massey, and built the New Hall in or about the year 1760. From him it descended to Sir Richard Bulkeley of Beaumaris, who sold the property a few years ago. The New Hall was burnt down about forty years ago, only two of the wings being saved; these stand to the north of the old Hall.

WILLASTON.

Willaston must have been an important village in early times, as at the date of the Domesday Survey, and for some time afterwards, the Hundred was called Willaston Hundred. From this fact we gather that the central governing body—the Hundred Court, as it was called—used to meet at Willaston. Curiously enough, the village itself is not referred to by name in the survey, though mention is made of a small manor called Edlaw, a name which is embalmed in our modern railway

station, Hadlow Road. This manor, like the great manor of Eastham, was held by the unfortunate Earl Edwin.

There is not much said about it in Domesday, for when the Normans came they found it waste, as were so many of the villages round Chester, owing to their stubborn resistance. But with one of those little touches of local colour that sometimes light up the great survey, it is added: "The Earl found it waste. But a man is now ploughing there and he pays two shillings."

We do not know at what date the village straggled along the road up towards the present site. Hadlow must have been half a mile nearer Burton. It may have happened when the land began to come into cultivation again after the desolation of the Norman conquest. It certainly took place at an early date, and the manor remained vested in the family of Trussel and its descendants until the reign of Queen Elizabeth, when their representative, the Earl of Oxford, sold it in several portions. One of these shares was bought by Hugh Bennett of Willaston, a wealthy yeoman—a distant relative of the founder of the Bennett Charity at West Kirby. Hugh Bennett, in 1558, built the house which is now known as Willaston Hall. The date, 1558, and the initials H.B., which are to be seen cut in stone over the door, have only been added recently, and though, no doubt, a correct statement of fact, are rather misleading.

LEIGHTON.

Very little is now left of Leighton Hall, which must, however, have been an important house at one time. Its chief claim to interest lies in the fact that the park, sloping down from the Hall to the Dee side, seems to have given rise to

the name Parkgate, a port which only rose into prominence at the end of the seventeenth century.

Leighton Hall was for some centuries the home of the family of Hough, of Leighton and Thornton Hough. This family ended in an heiress in Queen Elizabeth's reign, who carried the property to her husband, William Whitmore, second son of Whitmore of Thurstaston. Here the male line failed again; and William Whitmore's only daughter carried the property into the family of Savage, of Rock Savage, near Runcorn. Her son, Darcy Savage, built the Hall, the remnants of which still remain. In the courtyard can be seen a stone, with the initials, D.^S.A. (which stand for Darcy Savage and Anne, his wife) over the date, 1665. A third time the line failed; and Bridget, the only daughter of Darcy Savage, married Sir Thomas Mostyn of Mostyn, in whose family the property remained until last century, when Lord Mostyn sold it to Mr. Johnston, the uncle of the present owner.

GAYTON.

In Gayton Hall we find the original home of the Glegg family in Wirral, from whence spread the Gleggs of Caldby Grange, the Gleggs of Irby, and the Gleggs of Tranmere. Where they came from before 1380—at which date Gilbert Glegg married the heiress of Gayton, Joan Merton, and settled in Wirral—is not known. It has been suggested that they were Cleggs of Clegg Hall, in Rochdale, but this is merely a guess.

It is sufficient for our purpose that they were the most important family on the west side of the peninsula, and held their estates in unbroken male descent until the death of William Glegg, in 1758, when the property passed to the Baskervyles of Old Withington, near Manchester, who assumed the

name of Glegg, and are still the owners of the Hall and manor.

The house is really older than it looks, having been re-cased in brick about 150 years ago. The two trees on the lawn in front of the Hall are known as William and Mary, having been planted in commemoration of a visit paid in 1689, when William III, on his way to Ireland, stayed for a night at Gayton Hall, and knighted William Glegg, the then owner.

At an earlier period the Gleggs, unlike their neighbours the Stanleys and Masseys, seem to have shewn strong Puritan leanings, and during the Civil War took a somewhat active part on the side of the Parliament.

William Glegg, the grandfather of the man who was knighted in 1689, gives an interesting account of his behaviour during the Civil War, in some evidence which he tendered in a case before the Court of Sequestrators for Wirral in 1649.¹⁹

He tells how he was seized at his own house, Gayton Hall, by a troop of horse, taken to Chester, and confined in the castle. The effect of the imprisonment was so detrimental to his health, that he was obliged, as he expresses it, to "ransom himself" out of prison by paying £38, besides his fees and charges in prison. He returned to Gayton Hall, but a second time a troop of horse came from Chester and carried him away, as well as his son William, who was subsequently Rector of Heswall. He complains especially that the soldiers came "directely to my chamber so that I had not time to put on my clothes. They also," he writes, "took away my wife's and children's clothes and everything they could carry away. They took seven of our horses with the saddles, and my poor wife and children had much trouble

¹⁹ *Cheshire Sheaf*, Series III, vol. i, p. 14, Sanders and Irvine.

“saving the kine.” This time he was seven weeks in prison, and only succeeded in getting out by being exchanged for Sir Nicholas Byron, a celebrated Royalist. After this, he adds: “I was at home [at Gayton] in such great feare, for they still threatened to make me a prisoner again, that I scarce lay any night in my bed. [But one night as I did so] the forces from Chester came to my house. I sprang out of bed, took my clothes in my hand, ran out and lay down in a corn field, and so I praise God skaped their hands.”

In the grounds of Gayton Hall still stands one of the two remaining columbaria, or dove-cots, in the Hundred of Wirral, bearing the date 1663. The other is at Puddington Old Hall. The privilege of possessing a dove-cot was very highly prized in the middle ages, and was one of the many causes of discontent among the peasantry. The sole right of keeping pigeons vested usually in the lord of the manor, and he exercised it to the full, often keeping thousands of birds, which wrought sad havoc among the crops of his tenantry. They formed a welcome addition to the manorial larder, however, during the autumn and early winter. Some pointed gables at the back of the house show signs of earlier work than the refaced front.

OLDFIELD.

A short walk to the north brings us to a curious isolated little house, or rather two houses under one roof, known as Oldfield. Small though it is, this building is a Manor House, and while quite innocent of any features of architectural interest, is not altogether without historic associations, as it was to this house that Sir Rowland Stanley of Hooton, one of the most famous Cheshire knights of Elizabeth's day, retired in his extreme old age after

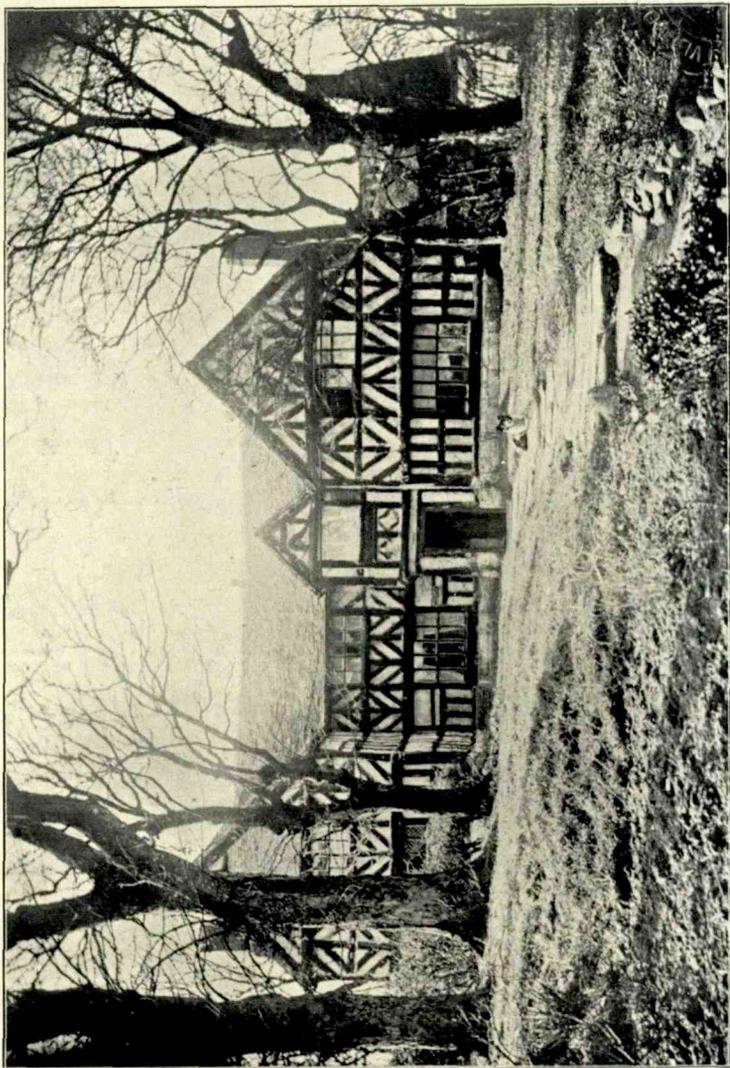
marrying his third wife, Joan Brown of Capenhurst. Here the old veteran died in 1614, aged, so his epitaph in Eastham Church tells us, 96 years.²⁰

One cannot help pondering over the wonderfully varied experiences with which this distinguished man must have met. As a boy he saw the dissolution of the monastic houses, and all the religious turmoil of the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI. He was still quite a young man when Queen Mary ascended the throne. Twice at least during her reign we find him leading a detachment of Cheshire archers to the wars. In his early middle life he saw Elizabeth take the place of her fanatical sister, and though Sir Rowland was no friend of the Reformation, he appears to have escaped most of the penalties, in spite of his adherence to the old faith. In 1576 he was made Sheriff of the county, an office which was much coveted at this time, and a dozen years later he contributed the by no means trifling sum of £100 towards arming the country to meet the Spanish Armada. He was growing old now, but seems to have retained his full faculties to the last, and no doubt watched Elizabeth's closing years with the keenest eyes. He saw her die, and yet another reign begin, and not until James had been ten years on the throne did the old man meet his end, in this quiet farmhouse on the hill side, looking out across the sands of Dee.

IRBY.

Turning inland a little we find Irby Hall. Before restoration, one of the most picturesque farmhouses in the county, even now it has many attractive features.

²⁰ This is a curious example of the tendency of old men to exaggerate their age. It is abundantly clear from other evidence, *e.g.*, Inq. P.M. of William Stanley, 38 Henry VIII, and a suit in the Bishop's Court, concerning Stanlow Tythes, where Sir Rowland gives his age, that he must have been born about 1524, and, therefore, would only be between 89 and 90 at the time of his death.



IRBY HALL, CHESHIRE
Before Restoration

BRITISH LIBRARY

The house has an interesting history. As far back as the year 1093, the manor of Irby was presented by the Earl of Chester to the Abbey of St. Werburgh in Chester, and became one of its four principal manor houses. These, by a later charter, were required to be of sufficient size to receive the Abbot and his retinue when he came to hold his Court. We have already seen one of these houses at Bromborough, and like it, this grange was also moated, as a protection against the marauding Welsh. A considerable portion of the moat remains, and in one place it is still sixteen feet in depth, when measured from the apex of the bank to the bottom of the ditch.

At the dissolution of the monasteries, Irby was held by Sir Richard Cotton; from him it passed, by sale, through the Harpers and Leighs, to Edward Glegg of Caldby Grange, who left it to a younger son, of the same name. From him it descended to the present owner, Mr. Birkenhead Glegg of Backford.

The house was considerably altered a few years ago, and though it then lost much of its picturesqueness, is still a charming old place. The stone portion at the back is practically unaltered, and gives us a very good example of the substantial kind of chimney which our ancestors loved to build.

The outhouses are also picturesque, especially a barn with the pretty curved gables that are typical of late Stuart architecture.

THURSTASTON.

From Irby it is a short walk across the fields to Thurstaston.

Thurstaston, like Irby, has a history extending over many centuries. At the Conquest, it was granted by William to his trusty follower, Robert of Rhuddlan, whose heroic death, in 1088, is related

so graphically by the old chroniclers. Odericus Vitalis tells how Lord Robert lay resting at high noon, on a hot July day, between the twin hills of Deganwy, where stood one of his castles.²¹ He had taken off his armour and wore only his tunic. As he lay there he suddenly heard the distant sounds of armed men, and springing up, saw below him a band of Welsh pirates landing on the shore. Without waiting to don his armour, he seized his sword, and shouting to a single knight to follow, rushed down on the marauders. The fight was short but fierce. Surrounded by the Welsh, he was overpowered by superior numbers, and sank under a rain of blows, not, however, before he had made the robbers pay dearly in life and limb. Odericus tells us that his death was mourned far and wide, by both French and English.

At his death the property seems to have passed to a family who assumed the local name, and became Thurstastons of Thurstaston. From them it passed, by marriage, to the Heswalls, and again, by marriage, to the Whitmores, a family of Chester merchants, who rose to prominence about 1360. The Whitmores, after making a fortune in trade, did what has been done once or twice since, even in our own day—married into the county. The property remained in this family until the beginning of the present century. The Hall and part of the land is now the property of Mr. Birkenhead Glegg of Backford.

The Hall appears to have been built at different times. One portion may be as early as the fifteenth century, but the rest is much later, the west wing being built about 1680. The front, as we now have it, probably dates from about the year 1700, of which period the front door is characteristic, while the east wing is quite modern.

²¹ Vide Freeman's *William Rufus*, vol. i, p. 123.

Elizabeth Whitmore, a daughter of Edward Glegg of Gayton, who died in 1663, seems to have added some portion to the house, as in her will, dated 1662, now at Chester, she specially states that she is leaving a certain sum to her son William, which was evidently less than he anticipated, because, she explains, "I have expended and disbursed " several summes of money in repairing, re-edifying " and new-building of the manor-house of Thurst- " aston and outhouses thereto belonging."

Her will is an interesting one, and in the inventory of goods which accompanies it we have several curious glimpses into her household arrangements. The house evidently consisted of about fourteen rooms. We hear of the parlour, the hall, the nearer hall, the buttery, the dairy house, the nursery, the green chamber, the red chamber, M^{rs}. Whitmore's chamber, M^{rs}. Glegg's chamber, and "the "garratt," as well as the brewhouse and the kitchen. The list of furniture in the parlour may be of interest. There were 20 Russia Leather chaires, valued at 5s. a chaire, one red cloth chaire, one childes chaire, one court cupboard, one round table, four carpets, one clocke, three cushions, and one picture and frame, the latter item valued at 2s. 6d.

There is only space to mention another list, and this is the furniture of the nursery. It may be added that there must have been three children still in the nursery state at this time, and they are provided for as follows:—"One bedstead and "curtains, two course flock beds, two course "caddockes (a caddock was a rough kind of worsted "blanket or coverlet), one bolster, one spelken "basket (*i.e.*, a basket made of split wood, like a "modern baker's basket), and a wooden chest;" the total value of the furniture of this desolate apartment amounted to £1 1s. 6d.

The Whitmores, like most of the Wirral gentry, were staunch adherents to the old faith, and frequently appear as the subjects of heavy fines at the hands of the authorities. Valentine Whitmore commanded a company of foot during the siege of Chester, needless to say on the Royalist side, and was fined very heavily by the Committee of Sequestrators.

Thurstaston Hall has a reputation, common to many of our old houses, of possessing a supernatural visitant. At the risk of repeating a time-worn tale, and one which may be familiar to many, its outline may be given, as it possesses several features which single it out from the ordinary ghost story.

The following account is from a lady who lived in Thurstaston Hall within a year or two of the events recorded, and personally knew most of the actors in the story. The facts are as follows:—

A well-known and successful portrait painter was staying at Thurstaston Hall some years ago, during the execution of a commission on which he was engaged: the painting of the portrait of a member of the family then renting the Hall. He occupied the room which opens on to the stairs, on the left hand side as one ascends the topmost flight. The artist slept in this room for some time without being disturbed, until very early one morning he heard the door open, and on lifting his head to see the cause, espied a little old woman wringing her hands in evident distress. She came forward and stood at the foot of his curtained four-post bedstead without speaking, and though he spoke to her, saying something to the effect that she seemed in great trouble, and asking if he could help her in any way, she passed round to the other side of the room, pulled a bell-rope, and vanished.

The artist had the same experience several times afterwards, and although he felt it to be super-

natural, he became so used to it as to lose all sense of fear; and on one occasion made a rough sketch of the apparition, which he completed afterwards from memory. A copy of this is in the possession of the lady from whom this information comes.

The curious part of the story, however, is the sequel. Some time after this a gentleman, acquainted with the details of this story, was staying with some people in another part of England whose ancestors had once occupied Thurstaston Hall, and to his surprise he recognised that one of their family portraits was identical with the sketch of the apparition made by the artist. It then transpired that, according to a family tradition, the subject of the portrait was supposed to haunt Thurstaston Hall. When these facts were related to the artist, he solemnly declared that he had previously neither heard of the family nor of the legend connected with it, and had, of course, never seen the portrait in question.

GREASBY.

At Greasby is a picturesque old house, which appears to have been built by a family of the name of Radcliffe, and from them to have descended, or been sold, to the ubiquitous Gleggs.

Close to, at the top of the hill, on the right hand side of the road as one comes from Upton, stands another interesting old house, which, unfortunately, from an artistic point of view, has recently been re-roofed. Over the porch is a stone, bearing the date, 1680, and the inscription, *I. W. M.* which stands for Joseph and Mary Warton.

NEWHOUSE.

Moving across to another part of the old parish of West Kirby, we may visit another of the old

manor houses, Newhouse by name. The building is sufficiently uninteresting-looking as it at present stands, but a drawing among Mr. Vyner's papers, dated 1663, shows it at that time as a house with two steep gables facing south. As at Bidston Hall, these have been removed at some time, and a single line of roof, running east and west, substituted.

Over the doorway is still visible, though nearly obliterated by weathering, a coat of arms of the family of Bennett.²²

The house was originally built by one of the Coventrys, an old Chester family. They continued to hold it for some time, until William Coventry identified himself too closely with the Parliamentary party during the Civil War. He acted, in fact, as one of the sequestrators for Wirral, and, consequently, incurred very violent opposition, which seems to have led to his being obliged to leave the district at the Restoration, as we find him, in 1660, selling the property to Thomas Bennett of Newton, whose arms, as has just been said, are still to be seen over the door. Thomas Bennett, dying without children, left this house and lands to the charities of West Kirby.

GRANGE.

The township of West Kirby, at the time of the Conquest, appears to have been included in the manor of Great Caldy. This was granted at an early date to the Abbey of Basingwerk, and though the monks of Basingwerk lost the advowson of the church, they retained their temporal possessions

²² The coat of Bennett of Saughall Massey was: *Argent, two bars gules, a bordure engrailed sable.* It is still possible to make out the two bars, and in one or two places scraps of the bordure are still visible to the believing eye.

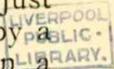
until the dissolution of the monasteries. The history of Caldy Grange is very obscure for some time after this, but at the beginning of the seventeenth century we find the manor in the possession of the Gleggs, who continued to hold it until about seventy years ago, when it was sold to Mr. John Shaw Leigh of Liverpool.

About this time the Hall was taken down, and a farmhouse built on the site. There is practically nothing of the original building left, and only a portion of the old avenue still stands, though all traces even of the road that led between the still beautiful trees has long since disappeared.

And to what does all this take us? One cannot, I think, ponder the stories of varied fortune which we have read, without being impressed, first of all, by a sense of change. One by one the old families have died out; new ones have risen, only in their turn to pass into oblivion. It is a fact worthy of mention, that of all the old houses we have just been considering, not one is now occupied by a family that has been there for more than a generation²³

The men have changed. But the same fields are with us to-day that a thousand years ago gave up their yearly treasure to our English forefathers. We get a few more bushels of wheat to the acre, the cattle that graze on the rich pasture lands scale a little heavier, but the fields are the same, nay, we might even say that the hedgerows are the same. The cattle go out and come home at evening along the lanes that have been worn by the footsteps of fifty generations. Sunshine and shower play over the fields just as they did before the Norman William came. But where are the families of even a

²³ Except Oldfield.



hundred years ago? The Stanleys, the Pooles, the Gleggs, the Houghs, and the Whitmores. All are gone; and the broad acres that knew them, know them no more.

But, if they have gone, can we not truly say that their places have been taken by men as worthy as they? If the old English squire has faded before the push and energy of a great mercantile community, we have no right to grieve. It is not another race that has taken their place; it is the same blood, though perchance it runs less sluggishly. If the land becomes theirs by conquest of peace, and not of war, should we not rather rejoice? It is not always an unmixed evil to find new men on old acres.

