



LYDIAT HALL, LANCASHIRE.

IN THE QUADRANGLE. THE PORCH.

LYDIATE HALL, NEAR ORMSKIRK,  
LANCASHIRE.

*By Henry Taylor.*

Read 8th March, 1894.

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LYDIATE Hall, an old Roman Catholic home in the low-lying district known anciently as "inter Ripam et Mersham," is situated about half way between the Ribble and the Mersey, and stands on slightly rising ground, which forms the watershed of the little river Alt. The buildings are thus lifted out of the great marsh or bog which extends for miles around, and may be seen from a considerable distance. The Hall is about five miles inland from Formby Point, and though the trees surrounding it are of ancient growth, they have not altogether escaped the retarding and contorting effect of the sea breezes. As so often happens in similar cases, this westerly or "weather" side of the house has become dilapidated, and has had to be rebuilt in brick; but the easterly side and the parts within the quadrangle still remain in their original and picturesque style of half-timbered architecture.

The surrounding country is still quite agricultural, of the rough and rude Lancashire type, though the new railway between Liverpool and Southport, which passes near the building, may shortly break up the seclusion of the place with the villa of the man of commerce.

Apart from the architectural interest of an excursion to Lydiat—with which may be included a visit to the fine church at Sefton, full of beautiful carved-oak work—the country itself has a peculiar charm of its own. It is, indeed, unlike any other part of England with which I am acquainted, and for its special characteristics has been frequented by a school of artists who affect the modern French landscape style, and who find here ample materials for their pencil. The wild winds which cut across the flat country have given the little homesteads their own homely character. All is long and low. The little white-washed farmhouse, with its ling-covered roof, and the adjacent stack-yard and barns, are protected by a clump of trees, the boughs of which have a strong “set” inland.

On a day in August on which we visited the place, we had a pleasant picture. A wide landscape, studded with little homesteads; the dykes; the windings of the River Alt; the blaze of yellow ragwort, contrasting with the purple heather; the rabbit-warrens; the lapwings and black sea-birds; the four church-steeple and windmills; and the peculiar brilliantly coloured costumes of the women in this secluded agricultural district!

The accompanying illustrations sufficiently indicate of how thoroughly “old world” a character is this relic of bye-gone times, and how well it looks, standing back in a small park, a good arrow’s flight from the high road between Halsall and Maghull.

Following a rule which prevailed much in Lancashire, and which to us is rather unaccountable, the house faces nearly due east. It is, however, sheltered from the wild Atlantic winds by the thick clump of trees already referred to, which encircles it more or less on the west, north,

and south, and which sets off to great advantage the half-timbered architecture.

A few hundred yards to the south of the Hall are the remains of the domestic chapel, improperly called Lydiate Abbey ; a building erected by Lawrence and Katharine Ireland, towards the end of the third quarter of the fifteenth century. The ruins consist of the nave and the western tower. The architecture, which is of the florid style which prevailed at that late period, is in a fair state of preservation, and it is not easy to understand why the restoration of this little chapel was not undertaken, as a place of worship for the Roman Catholics of the district, instead of the erection of the somewhat uninteresting new building which now stands nearly facing the old Hall.

Returning to the old Hall itself, we find here no exception to the general rule, which holds good both in ancient ecclesiastical and domestic architecture ; for it is a kind of museum of the different styles which prevailed in England from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. The building, though one of the smaller halls of Lancashire, is yet of considerable interest ; and by the massiveness of its construction, and its rich ornamentation, was clearly built by people of good estate.

Earlier houses may not improbably have stood on the present site, for the ownership of the De Lydiates is traced back, by the Rev. T. E. Gibson, as far as the early Edwardian period ; but no trace of any such mansion now exists. In Mr. Gibson's book on Lydiate Hall,<sup>1</sup> the suggestion is made that the eastern portion of the quadrangle, now pulled down, being of stone, must necessarily have been of earlier date than the existing great hall, which is of timber ; but Dr. Whitaker, in the chapter on

<sup>1</sup> *Lydiate Hall and its Associations*, p. 2.

“ Domestic Architecture ” in his *History of Whalley*, confirms the result of my own researches, proving that prior to the time of Henry VIII the almost universal building material was timber (except in the case of very stately houses, situated in a district where stone was easily to be had), but in the time of his immediate successors there was in Lancashire a wholesale rebuilding in stone and brick. This was especially the case in the reigns of Elizabeth and James I, the improved roads helping in the conveyance of the heavier material, and the demolition of the forests of oak necessitating the employment of brick or stone. At Harden Hall, in Cheshire, the old half-timbered portion remains (date about Edward III), whereas the new grand portion, built in stone about the time of Elizabeth, has fallen down of late, through bad construction.

To return to the home of the De Lydiates. The earliest portion of the existing building is of the well-known H-shaped type, the great hall forming the centre of the block, with family and servants' wings right and left of it. The date of this H-shaped portion of the present building is clearly recorded, both by the unerring tale which is told by its style of architecture, and by documentary evidence of unimpeachable character.

The Rev. T. E. Gibson, who for many years lived at the Hall, spent much time in investigating the deeds of the Blundell family—the owners of the property—and in his interesting book he has explained how Lawrence Ireland (whose initials are placed in the spandrels of the doorway leading from the passage into the hall) built this, the earliest part of the house, leaving it not quite finished. He died before 1485. It was completed, we are informed, by his successor, John Ireland, before the reign of Henry VII had come to an end. He died in 1514.

It is not improbable that this same John Ireland added also largely to the house, extending the family and servants' wings, and, in fact, may have completed the whole quadrangle, including the gate-house, as shown on the accompanying plan.

The building appears to have been surrounded by a moat, in the manner almost universal in mediæval times, and some indications of it are still visible at the front of the house. Near the site of the gate-house is to be seen the mounting block, inscribed F.A. 1748, a common feature in the old Lancashire halls. The gate-house and those portions of the eastern side of the quadrangle so indicated on the plan, were pulled down about the year 1780.

The chief interest of the building is concentrated in the great hall, an apartment about 32 feet long and 18 feet wide. Being built about a century after the period when the importance of the great hall as an apartment was at its height, we do not find here a grand open-timbered roof, as at Rufford, but a flat ceiling, as at Speke. It is, however, most elaborately ornamented by massive oak beams and joists. The height from floor to plastered ceiling does not exceed 11 feet 4 inches, thus necessarily precluding the erection of a minstrels' gallery.

At the southern end of the room stood the high table, surmounted by an elaborately carved and moulded canopy, which still exists. It is divided into thirty-six panels, by moulded oak work. At the intersection of these moulded ribs are elaborately carved bosses, the subjects of which are minutely catalogued in Mr. Gibson's book. They are of the quaint and fanciful character which is to be found in the work of this epoch, and consist of a dancing bear, a goat, a ram, a lion rampant, an owl, a wolf sejant, a bear passant, a mermaid, various heraldic devices, the pomegranate, the rose, and

other fruits and flowers, and many other curious devices.

At the western end of the high table was the ladies' bower, separated by a wooden archway from the great hall. This archway has been blocked up, but on digging outside, I discovered the foundations of this interesting little apartment, in which, doubtless, much love-making and gossip had gone on over the embroidery frame. At the eastern end of the high table is the staircase to the family bedrooms, and doorways leading to the smaller hall and parlour.

As at Speke, the great fire-place is at the opposite end of the hall to the high table, and is built on a similar plan, though, unlike the Speke example, it appears to have been part of the original structure, and not a subsequent insertion. Its inside space is about 12 feet in width and 3 feet in depth. Unlike the majority of the Lancashire ingle-nooks, it had no seats within it, but in connection with it is a shallow bay or recess in the west wall of the apartment (shown on plan), forming a very snug corner close to the fire. It is the only example of such an arrangement with which I am acquainted. Behind the great fire-place is the usual passage through the building from the quadrangle to the garden, and from it are the usual entrances to the great hall on one side and the kitchen and butteries on the other.

Returning for a moment to the great hall, we may notice the pretty effect obtained in the ceiling by the arrangement of the joists in the square panels formed by the great beams; for, as at Samlesbury and Little Moreton halls, the direction of the joists is changed in the alternate panels—a very favourite arrangement with Japanese artists. It forms, in fact, a kind of basket-work pattern, such as is to be seen in the carved spandrels of the nave arches in Bayeux Cathedral.

The great hall is lit by a continuous range of windows along its two sides, their sills being about seven feet from the floor, the walls below the sills having been wainscotted, the upper portion being enriched with the linen panel ornament.

At the back of the high table are the usual family rooms, consisting of the smaller hall and parlour for the lord and lady, the ceilings being ornamented by moulded oak beams; and above them is a fine withdrawing room, with panelled walls richly carved, and with a ceiling similar to that in the rooms below. Its length is about 31 feet, and width 15 feet 9 inches. Amongst the carvings in the wall panels, which are alleged to have been brought from the eastern apartments, are representations of five of the wives of Henry VIII, of Edward VI, and of Henry VIII with Katharine of Arragon. The work is delicately executed. In this now-dismantled room are some relics of the past, consisting of a crossbow, curious old candlesticks, and other antiquated furniture.

Above the great hall was a large apartment, which seems to have been intended as a dormitory, now divided into several apartments. For many years it was used as a chapel. Mr. Gibson tells us that when some alterations were made in this apartment, in the year 1841, "it was found necessary to remove a chimney of "spacious dimensions rising from the great hall "below, and a curiously contrived hiding-hole was "discovered in it, entered by a sliding panel. "Another hiding-place still exists in this south "wing, accessible by means of the rafters. This "is a small chamber, ten feet by four. In 1863, "when laid bare by the alterations going on in "the roof, some young friends found in it a "fowl-bone, which they carried away as a relic of

“one of the solitary meals of some persecuted  
“Lydiate priest.”

The servants' wing has been completely gutted, but it does not appear to have presented many features of interest.

An effective interior view of the great hall is given in Rimmer's *Old Halls of Lancashire*, a book published about the year 1852, and now very scarce.

The house is at present empty, and undergoing extensive repairs and alterations.

A minute description of the pedigrees of the families who have lived at Lydiate is beyond the scope of this paper, but the following brief account, taken from Mr. Gibson's book, may not be without interest to the members of this society:—

“According to Dr. Kuerden, the De Lydiates and the De Halsalls own a common progenitor in William Gernet, a Norman follower of Paganus de Vilars, and enriched by him with a large tract of country previously held by Saxon proprietors. (P. xiii.) The De Lydiates failed in the male line as early as the end of the fourteenth century, and have left but few traces of their existence. In 1325, John de Lydiate was sent over to Ireland by King Edward II, to procure provisions for his English army. This may or may not have been John de Lydiate, son of Benedict, who held Lydiate in 1322, and who, in 1375, calls himself John Benetsone de Lydiate. His sole daughter and heiress, Katharine Benetsone, married, first, Robert de Blakeburne, but after his death, on attempting to make over her Lydiate estate to a member of the family of her second husband, Nicholas Parr, she was pronounced, at an inquisition held at Ormskirk, 1st of April, 1415, to be of unsound mind.

“Agnes, sole daughter and heiress of Robert de Blakeburne and his wife Katharine Blakeburne, married Thomas de Ireland, a scion of the ancient house of Ireland of Hutte. This alliance raised the proprietors of Lydiate a step in the social ladder, and the existing Hall, as well as the ruined chapel of St. Katharine, all the work of their son Laurence, bear evidence to the increased wealth and importance of its new owners, lords of Garston as well as of Lydiate. (Pp. xiv-xv.)

“To the Irelands succeeded the Andertons of Lostock, a family founded by Christopher Anderton, a scion of the ancient

race of Anderton of Anderton, near Chorley, of good local standing. In the first year of Queen Elizabeth's reign, Christopher Anderton was a lawyer of Lincoln's Inn, and seems to have amassed a considerable fortune. (P. xvi.) Sir Charles Anderton, the second baronet of Lostock, who married Margaret, daughter and heiress of Laurence Ireland, was the first possessor of Lydiate of this family, and his residence at his ancestral seat of Lostock deprived Lydiate of the fostering care of its immediate owners, a sure forerunner of decay. (P. xvii.) Eventually Sir Francis Anderton, the sixth and last baronet of Lostock, after narrowly escaping the loss of his head in the perils of 1715, found here a secure harbour for the last thirty years of his life, where he died in 1760. . . . With him the baronetcy became extinct, the estate of Lydiate becoming the property, after some trouble, of his nephew, Robert Blundell, Esq., of Ince Blundell, whose grandson, Charles Robert Blundell, who died unmarried in 1837, devised his estates to Thomas, second son of Joseph Weld, of Lulworth, co. Dorset, Esq., whose son, Charles Weld-Blundell, Esq., is the present owner of Lydiate."

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NOTE BY MR. EDWARD W. COX.

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The name of Lydiate, or Lidyat, expresses a gate or bar on a road, to restrain free ingress and egress to common village lands. It is apparent that where the common lands were wide, villages only were fenced at early dates to keep them from the trespass of cattle, the lands and communal fields being open and unenclosed ground.

It is most likely that we have in Lydiate Hall the whole of the original house, with such replacings in brickwork of the eighteenth century as the decay of the framing rendered essential. We have the list of rooms, and it should be possible to identify

those that remain, and from the list of those lost to form some idea of their plan and character.

From indications in the timber-work, it would seem as if the gate-house, though at least as high as the older house, had lower flanking wings. It is recorded that it was built of stone, and was of later date than the existing building. The panels in the upper withdrawing room ought fairly to give the date, as they have figures of Edward VI and Henry VIII's queens.

In many of the later mediæval buildings showing a combination of stone and timber structure, the latter seems to have been considered the superior material. At Nonsuch House, the masterpiece of Henry VIII's works, the servants' court was of stone, the state apartments of wood and plaster. Madely Manor, Peel Hall, and many other old halls show the same feature in their gate-houses.

The carved cornices of the upper drawing room are of the greatest interest. One line is like the hall, pure late Gothic; the other is renaissance work. Yet they are in the same room together. Were these latter in their original place, they would be among the very earliest in the style in England; but it must, I think, be assumed that they were either removed from the gate-house front, or put in when that was built. Torregiano was the first Italian artist who worked in that style in England. His well-known work is the tomb of Henry VII. King's College Chapel screen, with the initials of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, is one of the earliest works in this style. It is hardly likely that it was used previously in a remote Lancashire hall. Still its presence here is of the highest interest. In the few years that intervene between the building of the hall and its gatehouse, we have on the one hand the very latest Gothic art, still beautiful

and pure, on the other the change that was to consume and abolish and supersede the old—the beginning of the fall and loss of the science of architecture.

In the inventory of the goods of Edward Ireland, dated 1637, the names attached to the different rooms are recorded:—"There was the dyning chamber, the greate chamber, the hall chamber, the little chamber, als Mrs. Clives, [probably the housekeeper] the butterie chamber, the greene chamber, the canaby [canopied ?] chamber, the garden chamber, the brewhouse chamber, the nurseries, the squirrel chamber, the warde chamber, the rowlinge chamber, the great parlor, and the green parlor."

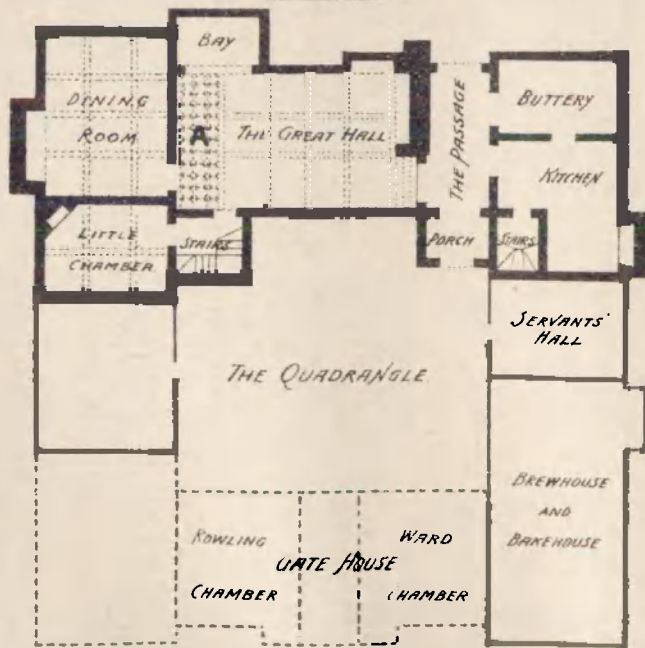
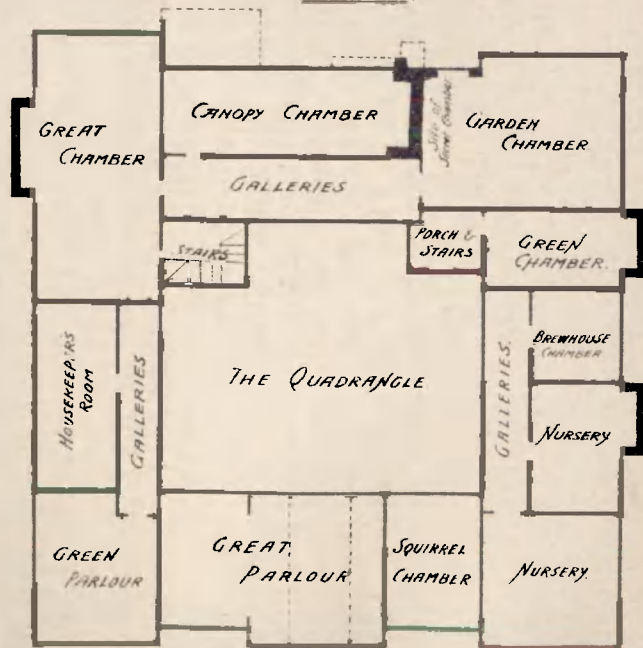
In attempting to recover the original plan of Lydiate Hall, we are assisted by the list of rooms given in the above inventory. The earlier portion of the house is planned, like many others of its date, with rooms sufficiently spacious, but very few in number. This house appears to have consisted only of the western side of the quadrangle, with a wing at the north and south ends; these projected eastwards only so far as the framed gables which are seen above the north and south sides of the quadrangle, which latter and lower buildings, together with the east side and its central gatehouse, were added at a later date, probably early in the seventeenth century, to form the quadrangle and inner court. The manner in which the roofs of the lower side buildings butt against the timbered gables, without connecting framework, is good constructional evidence that these gables were originally external features. It is also to be remarked that the characteristic horizontal lines of the older portion are not carried in all cases through the later buildings, and the character of the framing

is also later and much less carefully put together than that of the central or western portion of the work. The upper line of framing of the hall may, however, represent a late repair that has superseded a deep cove below the original eaves.

The first house would thus consist of the great hall, with the withdrawing room, and a lesser parlour at its south end; a large chamber over the hall, with a corridor on its eastern side; also a large and elaborately decorated chamber over the drawing room (or, as it is called in the list, the dining chamber or lesser hall), the parlour, and probably a small room over the bay of the hall. At the north end are the kitchen, butteries, and pantries, with a large room over each, and a smaller one over the porch; also a smaller one, with a secret chamber, by the hall chimney. It is not now ascertainable whether there were dormitories for the servants in the roof, but servants' apartments are included in the list given by Father Gibson. This was an extremely common arrangement, the low, long apartment being fitted with cubicles, like the berths of a ship.

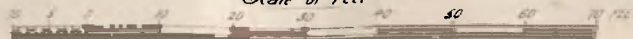
The arrangement of the great fireplace of the hall, so as to form a substitute for the screen commonly dividing the lower end of the halls of great houses from the entrances and the doors to the offices, is unusual, though something like this arrangement is to be found in ancient houses of humbler pretensions in Wales and Scotland, and partially also in the North of England and Cheshire. In Scotland the partially enclosed entrance by the hearth was called the "speere." A good example remained recently in the castle dairy at Kendal, a small building a little earlier than Lydiate, and having somewhat the same plan.

## · LYDIATE HALL · LANCASHIRE ·

*Ground Plan**First Floor plan*

A The Dais where stood the high table with fixed seat under the canopy.

Scale of feet



In the rooms detailed in the inventory the domestic offices appear to be omitted. The rooms over them are given, and some of them are accurately identified. Those in the earlier portion of the house are placed first, the remaining rooms, when marked down in the succession in which they are given upon the north, south, and east sides of the quadrangle, form a regular and consistent plan, and seem to occupy positions appropriate to their names. If we take the rooms of the upper floor from the north staircase in the succession in which they are given, we find and identify the first room reached as the "buttery chamber," over the buttery; and next to it the "green chamber," over the kitchen. Turning southwards along the corridor, the "canopy chamber" is probably so called because it is above the hall ceiling and the canopy of the dais. It is likely that a small room over the bay of the hall was the "garden chamber": it looked towards the plot of ground marked as a garden on the general plan. The hall, and dining room, and the little chamber and great chamber over them, all remain little altered in the centre and south wing of the older house, and are easily identified.

The list of rooms is continued in the north wing; they were reached by the corridor overlooking the courtyard. The "brewhouse chamber" is over the brewhouse, next the kitchen; then follow two nurseries, one having a large fireplace. Turning to the gatehouse front, we have the "wardroom" in its proper place on the right of the gateway, and over it the "squirrel chamber"; possibly the warder's room, reached by a ladder from the wardroom; the "rowing chamber," on the opposite side of the gateway to the wardroom, and the upper floor of the gatehouse; and the

southern part of this east front is devoted to the "great parlour" and the "green parlour."

It was very usual in early houses and in monasteries to place the guest rooms in and adjacent to the gatehouse, and nearly always on the first floor. These apartments were large, and handsomely fitted and furnished. If the great parlour occupied such a position, it would have nearly the same dimensions as the hall. In castles the gatehouse was frequently the prison, used for those whose imprisonment was not severe, or for prisoners of distinction.

At the south-east angle is placed the "green parlour." The name of this room, and its proximity to the "rowling chamber" next the gateway, seems suggestive of a bowling green having existed at this side of the house, rather than a derivation from the colour green; the name of the "garden chamber" having an analogous derivation. The lower apartments of the later south wing seem from their roughness not to have been dwelling rooms but offices, possibly stables for the owner's horses; and the upper room in this wing is the only one left to be allotted to Mrs. Clive, probably the housekeeper.

This conjectural allotment of the list of rooms given in 1637, will be found, as laid down on the plan, to complete a house typical of the period of its building. It is offered with due reserve for the lost portions, of which, it is hoped, plans giving full details before the destruction of the gateway face of the quadrangle may ultimately be found.

In the plans given of the hall, the bay on the west, next to the dais, which is no longer in existence, is shown as square, but recent examination of its foundation show it to have been polygonal. In many of the Lancashire halls the

polygon was not bisected on the side next the hall, but formed two-thirds or three-fourths of the polygon, as at Ordsall and Samlesbury. Above this was most commonly a small room, usually square, boldly overhanging the lower story. At Lydiat this looked towards the garden, and it seems to fall into proper sequence in the list as the "garden chamber."

In the list of furniture given by the inventory of 1637, the large number of beds in the house is to be remarked. Many of the rooms called parlours contained more than one; on the other hand, the "rowling chamber" had in it only a cupboard. We are enabled to see by the free distribution of beds throughout so many rooms how the apparent want of bedchamber accommodation was supplemented.

Although later additions have greatly changed Pool Hall, the original timber building of that edifice appears to be of nearly the same date as Lydiat, and the original plans have many features of correspondence. There is no certain indication that either building was in any measure made defensible by moat, outworks, or other arrangement. The whole character of both houses is purely domestic. The depression in the ground level in front of Lydiat Hall most likely marks an ancient road, and the base of a cross beside it seems also to indicate this.

The Chapel of St. Katherine, adjacent to the Hall, has already been well described. There remains, however, to be noticed that although it is late in date and cannot have been built many years prior to the Reformation, there are marks on the tower showing that it has been twice roofed. The roof at the lower level is nearly flat, and can only have been covered with lead.

If this were removed at the Reformation, the higher pitched roof, which is still a depressed one, seems to indicate a repair subsequently made by a slate or slab covering, and is curious, owing to the rarity of instances in which chantries or chapels have been repaired after their dismantlement at the Reformation. The masons' marks in this building are very clearly cut and of moderate size. Some half-dozen masons have worked upon it. Among other marks are the pentacle, the crossed flails, and the hour-glass, all more or less ordinary marks, and they are not found bearing quite the same character in other buildings in the vicinity.

