

AGECROFT HALL, LANCASHIRE.

AGECROFT HALL remains as a rare and fortunate example surviving from a great confraternity of venerable fellow dwelling-places, now perished or mostly fallen into decay, which once existed in Lancashire. Many are the changes that have passed over the mansion

since the Langleys kept house within its walls, and the incessant hum of the modern world in a busy outskirt of Manchester has filled a district which, in their time, was almost as remote as when the legionaries of the Cæsars had their quarters in Roman Mancunium. Its quadrangular

form gave light and space enough to the inhabitants, who, if the times were out of joint, could close their gates and turn their backs upon the turbulence without. The mansion stood, as it still does, upon a low tongue of land extending down from Pendlebury into the valley of the Irwell, and in a position rather unusual, for on the west side lies the edge of a steep cliff, while upon the other fronts, where now extend beautiful gardens, a moat completed the defence. The house itself is of that quaint timber and plaster style, with beams vertical, horizontal, and diagonal, quaint angles, carved oriel windows, and richly ornamental gables, which was almost universal in the old country houses of Lancashire and Cheshire. Admirable was the craftsmanship of the builders, excellent the skill they devoted to their work, proud the day of its completion.

Agecroft Hall was built in the time of Henry VII., or his successor, as the



THE ANCIENT ENTRANCE.

flamboyant details attest, but the family of Langley had been located there centuries before, and the existing house replaced one of earlier date, and some part of its foundations may well remain. The arms of "time-honoured

carved oriel above, not forgetting that the gate is still locked at night, shutting off those within from the outside world, while the watchman keeps his post as of yore. Within the quadrangle we find ourselves in scenes far remote from the present



THE HALL WINDOW.

Lancaster" are in the ancient glass, with Royal badges and the initials and armorial devices of Sir Robert Langley, the builder; but concerning the connection of John of Gaunt with Agecroft various opinions have been expressed.

We pass beneath the arch, and the beautiful

day, and wherein the spirit of the eld continues to dwell. Often, we think, in the long corridors may yet be heard the footfall of the knight and the rustle of the lady's kirtle, and with no surprise do we listen to the recital of strange stories that yet are told of those of other days who still haunt



THE ANCIENT CARVINGS IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

the night in Agecroft Hall. Opposite to the entrance arch is the long window of the great hall, with much magnificent ornamental timber-work, and great splendour in its ancient character. The kitchen, with the offices and servants'

exception of one small portion, all these have now been closed in.

The enclosing of the galleries will have suggested that Agecroft Hall has been modernised; but changes are inevitable, and when reverent



CARVED BEDSTEAD IN THE GREEN ROOM.

quarters, is on the right, while the family apartments are on the left hand, the old chapel having been converted into a dining-room. Originally the courtyard was surrounded by open galleries on the upper floor, much after the manner of the old quadrangular hostelrys, but, with the

hands graft some manifestation of existing times upon the evidences of an earlier age, let us not complain. So is the history of successive owners imprinted upon the place, and so, at Agecroft at least, is the place preserved. It is, indeed, in the hands of those who value both its character and



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THE HALL.

its traditions. When Sir Robert Langley died in 1560, his daughter and heiress, Ann, carried the estate to William Dautesey, her husband, a member of an old Wiltshire family, of whom a portrait, attributed to Holbein, hangs in the great hall at Agecroft. Thus the house passed to a family which long continued to reside therein. It came by female descent to the Rev. Richard Buck, and his brother John, who became owner of the estate, adopted in 1867 the name of Dautesey. His kinsman, the present owner, has also adopted the name, and thus the heritage of the Langleys is maintained.

beautiful and elaborate. There is a panelled ceiling, and rich dark oak wainscot, with attractive carvings.

The drawing-room is a light and beautiful chamber, with the admirable carved panellings which have been referred to. Here again is more of the splendid old oak, grouped with lyre-backed chairs, and other features of a later date. The breaking of style has a rather happy effect, and the aspect of the room is both comfortable and reposeful. The bedrooms are not less remarkable. Thus the green room has a very magnificent bedstead of rich, curious, and attractive style,



THE INGLE-NOOK.

Within, the venerable character is preserved in the mullioned windows, the ancient panelling, the fine wainscot, the old fireplaces, and the oaken ceilings, and most of all, perhaps, in the remarkable carved panels in the drawing-room, which go back to the time of Henry VII. or somewhat earlier. There is cheery warmth from the capacious fireplaces, and the aspect of friendly companionship in the chambers. The principal apartment is the great hall, which has undergone changes, but is a particularly fine example of old and curious work. The carved furniture, mostly of Jacobean date, is extremely fine, and all the fittings are both

elaborately carved and adorned; and the same chamber is furnished with magnificent armoires, and carved cabinets of rare and singular beauty. Louder still does another room speak of older times. There the great carved bedstead is earlier, and the walls and cabinets were even more richly worked by the old craftsman's hand. All appears to be in the style of Elizabeth or the Stuarts, though structurally, doubtless, the place is older. Few timber houses like Agecroft Hall are so well preserved, and long may it continue as an example of an old English dwelling-place, surviving with character little changed from ancient to existing times!