

LEVENS HALL, WESTMORLAND.

FEW old English homes present a more perfect specimen of the style of Elizabethan and Jacobean interior decoration than does Levens Hall. Beginning as a border pele tower of the early part of the fourteenth century, Levens was transformed into the present stately mansion during the reign of Elizabeth. The exterior of the house as approached from the north is remarkable for its extreme simplicity as compared with the wealth of decoration that has been lavished on the interior. With the exception of some additions of the eighteenth century, this work remains to the present day in perfect preservation, and as one of the most perfect specimens of interior decoration in the country ought certainly to be carefully cherished.

The earliest possessors of Levens of whom

there is any definite record were the Redman family, one of whom, Henry de Redman, bought the manor of Levens from Ketel, third Baron of Kendal, in 1188. Under a glass case in the small drawing-room, which is one of the subjects of our illustrations, may still be seen the original deed of purchase, together with another under the seal of Richard I., exempting the owner of Levens from the payment of nutgeld. For 300 years the Redmans held unbroken possession. Several members of the family represented Westmorland in Parliament, the earliest of whom was Simon Redman of Levens, Knight of the Shire in 1312. At a later date, Richard, son of Sir Matthew de Redman, who himself had been a member of Parliament, and had served in Spain and France under John of Gaunt, was Speaker of the short



THE SCREEN IN THE HALL, NORTH-EAST END.



THE HALL, SOUTH-EAST CORNER.

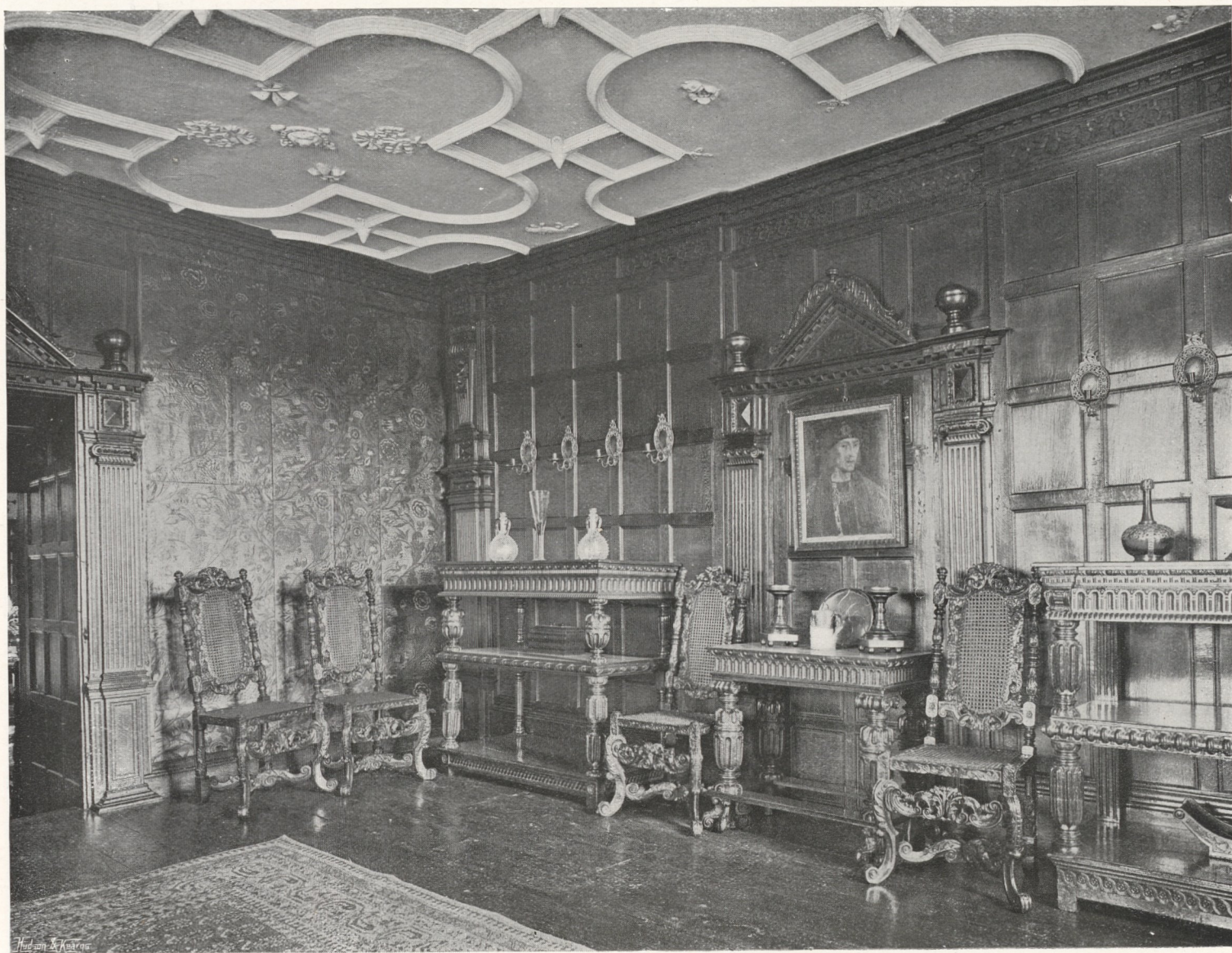


THE DRAWING-ROOM.

Parliament which met in 1415 to vote the money for Agincourt. This Richard was a man of some importance. He married the co-heiress of a moiety of the Barony of Aldborough and Harewood. His arms, which may be seen in the Speaker's house at Westminster, and which till lately could be traced in some old embroidery in the hall at Levens, were: Gules, a chevron argent, between three cushions ermine.

At the end of the fifteenth century Edward de Redman, who in 1482 was found by inquisition to hold the Manor of Levens of William Parr as of the Barony of Kendal, sold his entire Westmorland property to Alan Bellingham, a

he was a man of considerable wealth and importance, and was knighted by James I. at Durham in 1603. Correspondence exists between him and Lord Scrope, Warden of the Marches, on the subject of how they were to restrain the lawlessness of the Graham family on the borders, Sir James, no doubt, little thinking that one of those very Grahams of Netherby was eventually to take the place at Levens of the last of the Bellinghams of Westmorland. To this Sir James it was that Levens owed its transformation from a Border tower and hall to a richly decorated Elizabethan mansion. The present hall, of which the outer walls are the same as those of the old hall built



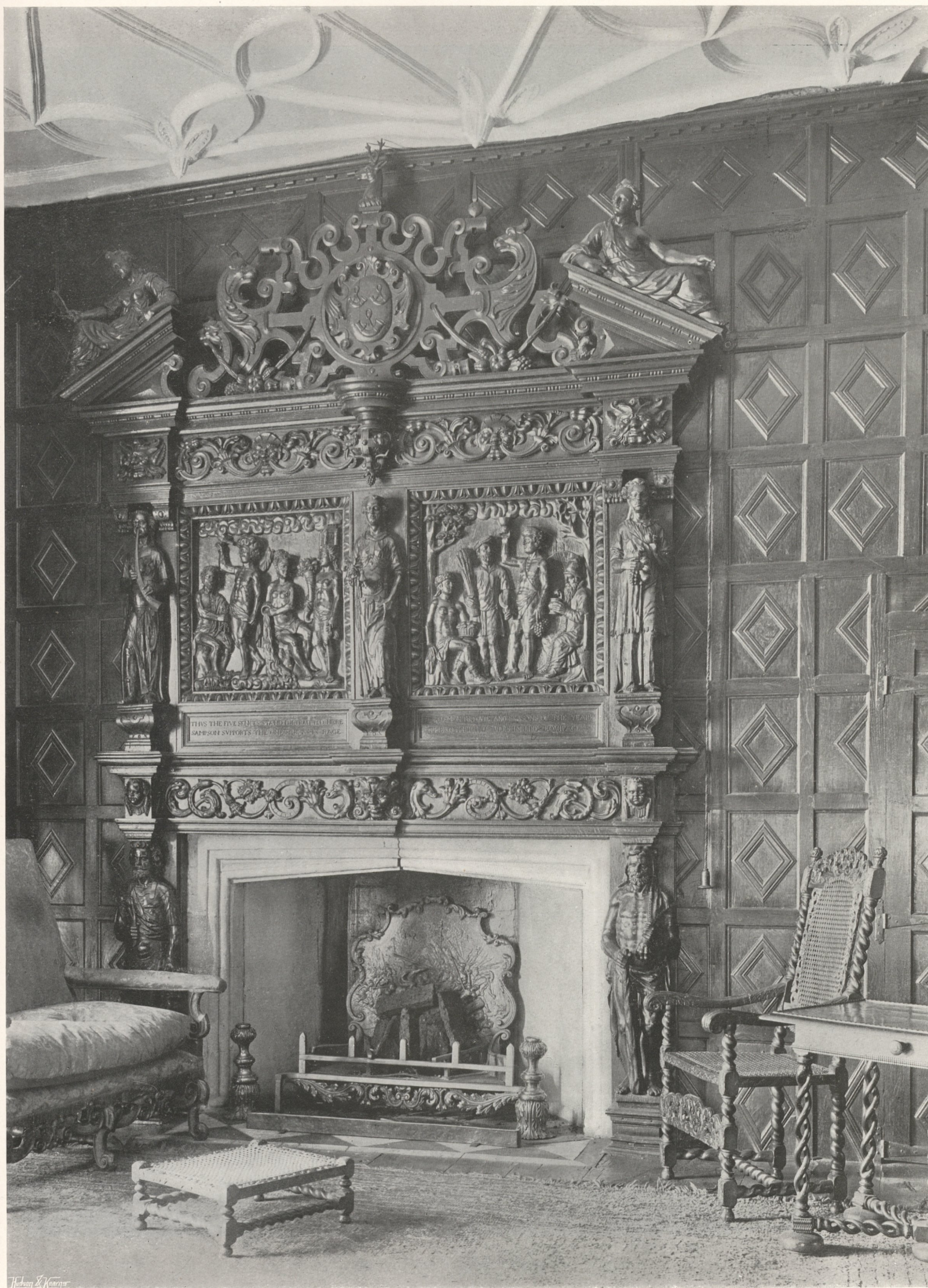
THE DINING-ROOM, SOUTH END.

possessor of considerable estates in Westmorland and Northumberland. This Alan was Treasurer of Berwick and Deputy Warden of the Marches. In the year 1546 he received from Henry VIII. a grant of the Lumley Fee, which constituted a fourth part of the Barony of Kendal. This still remains in the possession of the owners of Levens, the remaining three-fourths belonging to the Lowther property. His character is described in the scroll round one of the coats of arms in the north window of the large drawing-room:

"Amicus Amico Alanus
Belliger Belligero Bellinghamus."

Some thirty years later his great-grandson, Sir James Bellingham, succeeded to the old house;

by the Redmans, was certainly panelled and decorated by him, if not altogether made. That the old hall had gone up to the roof can be seen by an examination of the timbers still remaining, many of which are roughly shaped in the style of the old open-roofed halls of early England. The remains of the dais, a feature of the baronial and manorial halls of the period, are in the recess of the north window. This room is panelled for about three-quarters of its height, the oak being in perfect preservation and of beautiful grain. Above the panelling is an elaborate plaster frieze, on which are various Bellingham coats of arms. Over the fireplace are the arms of Elizabeth, while at the west



FIREPLACE IN THE SMALL DINING-ROOM.

*THE TWO DRAWING-ROOMS.*

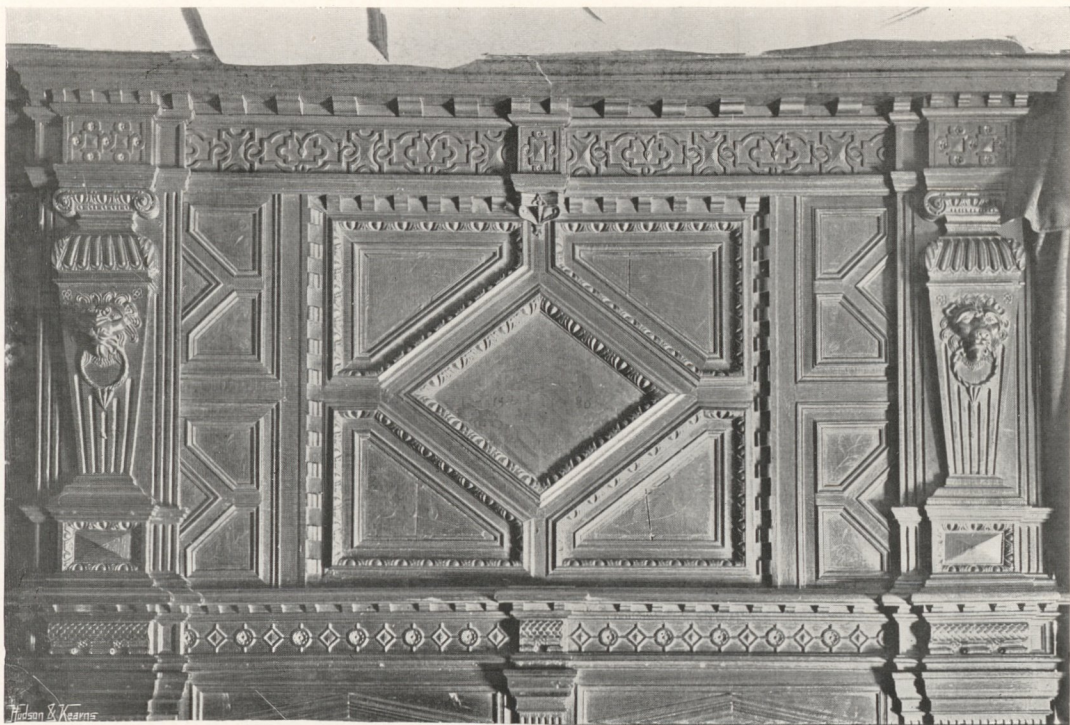


LEVENS HALL.

THE DAIS IN THE HALL.

end of the room is a solid piece of panelling with arms and supporters of the quaintest character, and the date 1610. A fine piece of tapestry of unusual size hangs over the entrance to the curious little chapel, and the large staircase of nearly a century later, which ascends from the east side of the hall to some rooms overhead, all of which are completely panelled in old oak or decorated with Spanish leather. One of these rooms is celebrated as having been occupied by Bishop Ken, a constant visitor in later times at Levens. Some of the Bellingham pistols and other arms with dates and initials, together with the breastplates of the armed retainers, who might be called for by the Warden of the Marches, hang round the walls.

The north drawing-room, which, together with the smaller room adjoining it to the south, opens out from the east side of the hall, is built over the arched basement of the old pele tower of the thirteenth century. A magnificent carved oak chimney-piece, with Bellingham arms and the date 1690, is the principal feature of this room, which is entirely panelled with a large diamond pattern, while the inner drawing-room to the south has a much smaller pattern of the same sort, and another massive carved chimney-piece of the same date. In the latter room is a beautiful picture by Hoppner, of Lady Mary Bagot, while in the larger room there is, besides the valuable collection of miniatures shown in our illustration, an extremely pretty picture of the school of Holbein, said to be Queen Anne Boleyn.

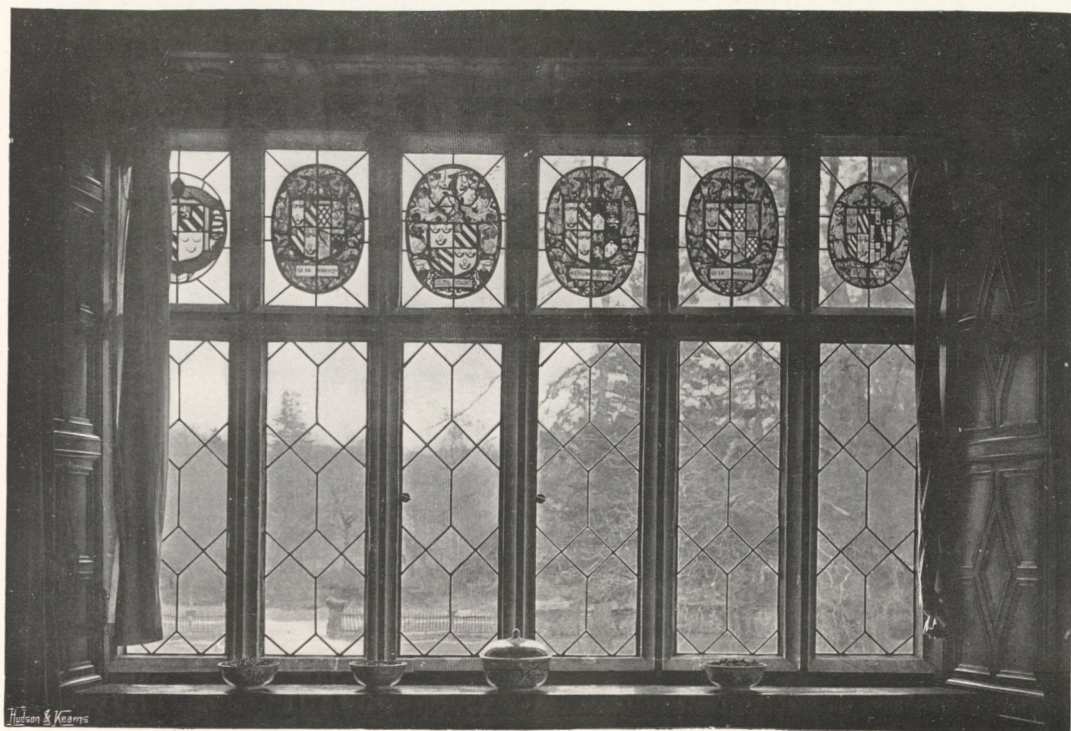


THE DINING-ROOM CHIMNEY-PIECE.

The stained glass in the windows of both rooms consists of coats of the arms of the Bellingham family and their connections, in excellent preservation; and amongst the many curiosities and artistic treasures in these rooms may be noticed two charters connected with Levens of 1172 and 1190, which have been mentioned, the latter with the seal of Richard I. attached and re-indorsed after Richard's return from captivity, a letter of Mme. de Pompadour's, James II.'s private accounts, the clasp of Napoleon's cloak, taken at Waterloo, and some fine Sèvres china, with portraits of Napoleon and his generals hunting, which belonged to the Duke or Wellington. The furniture throughout these rooms is entirely in keeping with the surroundings, and much of the carved work is very fine.

Perhaps the most perfect in its Elizabethan style and the prettiest room in the house is the

dining-room on the west side of the hall. This chamber is partly panelled and partly covered with a very richly-coloured Spanish leather; in the old inventories of the eighteenth century it is designated the "Gilt Parlour," no doubt from this gilded leather. The picture shown in our illustration of this room is one of Henry VII., by Mabuse, which was reproduced in the catalogue of the Tudor Exhibition a few years ago. The rich inlay and carving over the mantel-piece are of great interest, and have the appearance of the work of yesterday, though the centre panel tells



A WINDOW IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.



THE DRAWING-ROOM FIREPLACE.

its own tale, and depicts the arms and initials of Sir James and Agnes Bellingham, with the date 1586. On the ceiling are the red rose of the Tudors, the fleur de lys, and the Bellingham crest, in plaster-work. This room remains in exactly the state in which Sir James Bellingham left it, with the exception of one window, which is a later insertion.

The last of the Bellinghams of Levens was Alan, who represented Westmorland from 1681 to 1685. He sold his whole estate to Colonel James Graham, or Grahme, as he spelt it, a younger brother of Sir Richard Graham of Netherby, who was created Viscount Preston, and was sentenced to death for high treason a few years later. This Alan is described by a contemporary historian as an "ingenious but unhappy young man, who consumed a vast estate."

Colonel Graham was keeper of the privy purse to James II., and one of his most trusted servants; he had previously held the same office for the Duchess of York, who had been Mary of Modena. The Colonel accompanied King James in his flight to Rochester, and a most interesting paper remains at Levens, endorsed by Grahme "The King's reasons for leaving," in which is set forth at some length in the King's own handwriting his reasons for leaving the country. Together with this is a letter from Sir Stephen Fox to Mrs. Grahme describing the flight. The Colonel's picture by Lely, and that of his wife, Dorothy

Howard, Maid of Honour to Queen Catherine of Braganza, hang in the south drawing-room. Horace Walpole describes him as a fashionable man in his day and noted for his dry humour. He was a staunch Jacobite, and Levens appears to have been in his day a centre of treasonable plottings. A large mass of correspondence, much of which is in cypher, the keys to which are luckily preserved, remains in the house, including letters from the Duke of Hamilton, Bolingbroke, Godolphin, Ken, Atterbury, Kettlewall, etc. In spite of his Jacobite proclivities, Graham was returned at first for Appleby, and later for the county in every Parliament from 1702 to 1722. He made considerable alterations at Levens, his principal work being the large staircase leading out of the hall, and the extension and improvement of the gardens. His only living child and heiress married her first cousin, Henry Howard, fourth Earl of Berkshire, who succeeded him at Levens in 1722. The Earl's eldest son, Lord Andover, was killed while out hunting, and his widow lived at Levens till she was succeeded by her only surviving daughter and heiress, who married Richard Bagot, a son of Sir Walter Bagot of Blithfield, brother of the first Lord Bagot, who assumed the name of Howard, and brought this fine old house into the family of the present owner, Colonel Josceline Bagot, who is one of the M.P.'s for Westmorland, as have been various owners of Levens in every century since 1315.