

SOUTH WRAXALL MANOR, WILTSHIRE.

THIS most ancient and interesting manor house has long been known to architects as one of the best examples of mediæval domestic construction. It stands some three miles north of Bradford-upon-Avon, and is supposed to have been built about the thirteenth century. The external features of the house are certainly early, although it is permissible to doubt whether much of the structure can date from a period so remote, and obviously the house has undergone great modification in the course of the centuries. Much of it belongs to the fifteenth century, but it is of several different dates, and was partly reconstructed and enlarged in the reign of James I.

The manor was anciently part of the posses-

sions of the baronial family of Hungerford, but before the year 1433 had been transferred to the Longs. Leland says: "Mr. Long had a little maner about a mile from Munketone Farley at Wrexley (Wraxall). The original setting up of the house of the Longes cam, as I learnid from Mr. Bonehom, by these meanes—one Long Thomas, a stoute felaw, was sette up by one of the old Lordes Hungerford, and after by cause of this Thomas was callid Long Thomas; Long after was usurped for the name of the family. This Long Thomas had some lande by Hungerforde's procuracion. Then came one Thomas Long, descending of the younger brother, and could skille of the law, and had the inheritances of the aforesaid Longes.



THE RALEIGH ROOM.



THE DRAWING-ROOM, LOOKING WEST.



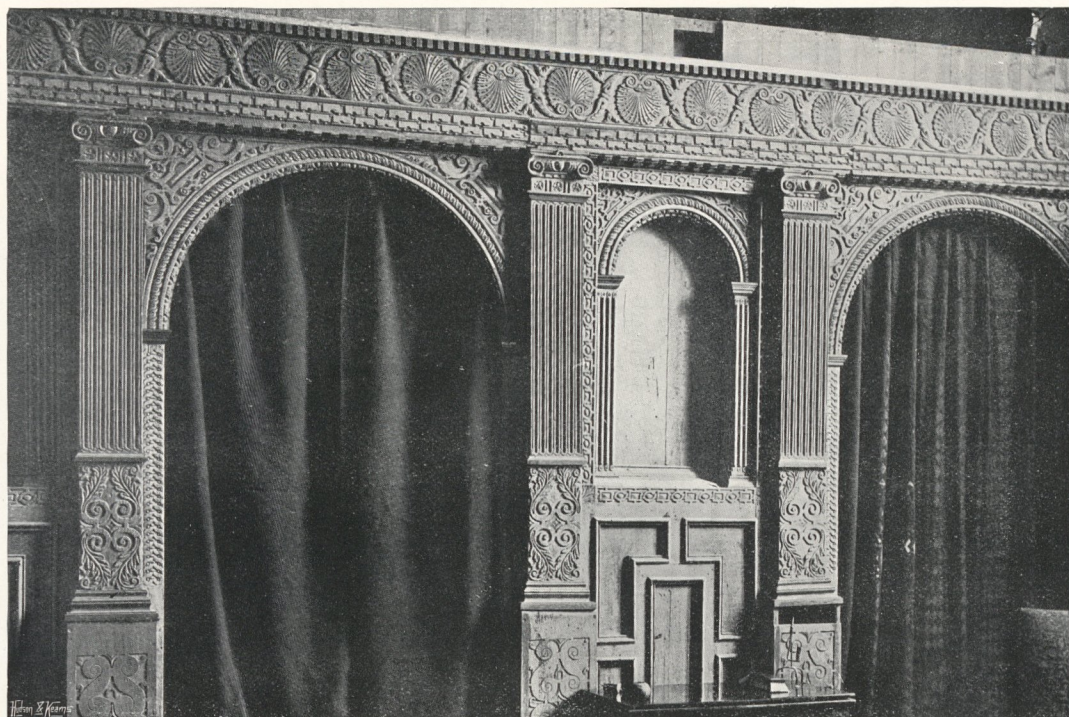
THE DRAWING-ROOM, NORTH SIDE.



THE DRAWING-ROOM, SOUTH SIDE.

Syr Henry and Syr Richard were the sunnes to this Thomas."

The first recorded possessor of the manor house is Robert Long, who was on the Commission of the Peace in 1426, and represented Wiltshire in Parliament in 1433. It is reasonable to conclude that in or about this time the house was enlarged and reconstructed. Certainly some of its fine features belong to that period, and the illustrations show the later work of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when much was done to the structure internally. Indeed, the great mantel-pieces and other more important adornments are in the fully developed style of the English Renaissance, and date from about 1575 to half a century later. The house has thus been preserved and beautified by representatives of the family of the first recorded possessor, and is now the property of



A PORTION OF THE SCREEN IN THE HALL.

the Right Hon. Walter Long, M.P., of Rood Ashton House, who is the chief landowner thereabout.

Our pictures do not show much of the earlier work at South Wraxall, but it will be noticed that the Hall is lighted by a window



THE DINING-ROOM CHIMNEY-PIECE.



THE CHIMNEY-PIECE IN THE DRAWING-ROOM.

with cusped lights, which probably belongs to the fifteenth century, and in the Raleigh Room is panelling of the folded linen pattern, not much later, though associated with Jacobean woodwork enframing a Tudor mantel-piece. The oldest portions of the house are, perhaps, the entrance gateway, which has a fine oriel window over it, and the Hall, with its porch and bay, probably belonging to the time of Henry VII. These may well have been built by the Walter Long who has been mentioned already.

The features of the Hall are very noteworthy. It dates from a time when the lord, his family, and his guests no longer sat at meals with his retainers and menials, with only the salt between them, or the distinction of the high table on the dais from the tables of those who sat below. At Wraxall the old dais seems to have disappeared, but its place in the Hall is known, and that apartment occupies the same relation to the domestic offices and the "solar" that was customary in nearly all old English houses. The unusual mantel-piece bears the date 1598, and has a curious design enframing a shield of arms with a grotesque head over it. The scrollwork is massive, and has a character not often seen. Some restoration, or rather regeneration of the old aspect of the apartment, has lately taken place, the evil jacketing of paint, which parts of the

woodwork had received, having been removed. The Hall screen, of which we give an illustration, has thus been taken in hand. It probably belongs to the reign of Elizabeth, and has fluted Ionic pilasters freely treated, with round arches and a cornice with a shell design. The roof of the Hall was partly hidden by a plaster ceiling at the time when the rich fireplace was inserted. A passage-way is behind, with a porch opening from the principal court at one end, and a door to the servants' court, or "pump

court," at the other, and at the back of the passage doors open to the buttery and pantry, in a line with which is the kitchen.

One remarkable feature of the house is the fireplace in the Dining Room, which stands between two bold Ionic columns rising to the ceiling. The adornments consist of two oval panels in admirable frames, with grotesque heads and fruit, and in the middle is the very quaint conceit of a baboon seated upon a bracket



THE GUEST CHAMBER CHIMNEY-PIECE.

with the inscription "Mors rapit omnia." The panels also bear inscriptions—"Faber est quisq. fortune sue," and "Æqua laus est a laudatis laudari et ab improbo improbari."

The grand Drawing Room, once the "solar" or "lord's chamber," to which a staircase leads up from the Hall, was enlarged in the time of James II., and is extremely handsome, with a richly ornamented plaster ceiling, fine panelling from floor to ceiling, a noble bay window, and, above all, the splendid mantel-

piece. We do not know anywhere so remarkable a work. The features are both bold and delicate, and were sculptured by a master hand. Here is the taste of Italy in the richest period of Renaissance design brought into a mediæval English house. On either side are two caryatid figures supporting the enriched cornice, which has also, as an important feature, a grotesque head below it in the middle, forming a characteristic bracket. Above this cornice rises to the ceiling the upper stage of the mantel. Over the supporting figures



THE CHIMNEY-PIECE OF 1598.

on either side are niches, each between two elaborated Corinthian columns, while in the middle, rising from the projecting portion of the cornice over the bracket, is a singular figure of Pan. In the niches on either side are Prudentia and Justitia, the latter with the scales, and on either side of Pan are other niches, round-arched, in which are Arithmetica, writing in a book, and Geometria with some instruments of the geometrical art. Moral maxims are below with enriched panelling, and above is an elaborate

architrave. This work belongs to that great period in which Englishmen engaged in honourable rivalry with one another in their efforts to beautify and adorn their country houses, and were enraptured with the spirit of Continental design. Very often foreign workmen were employed, which may well have been the case at Wraxall.

Another remarkable feature is a very unusual projection opposite to the fireplace, which has two storeys, the lower one having fluted Ionic piers and recesses or niches, with shell arching at the top. Above this rises to the ceiling enriched panelling, all of most admirable craftsmanship. The effect of this feature is to give quaint variety to the room, and the recesses were perhaps intended to serve as seats. In any case the architect and the craftsman worked successfully together. We can conceive with what satisfaction the possessor saw all this completed, and can picture the gay scene when there, with his lady, he welcomed his friends. It will be noticed in the pictures that the furniture is singularly choice and quite in the Chippendale character, with extreme fineness and delicacy as well as reserve in its workmanship.

Much in the same style, though with many differences, are other chambers in the house. Dame Eleanor's Room has a magnificent mantel-piece, also in two stages, with coupled columns at either side, and strapwork pattern panels and floral adornments above, and the workmanship is scarcely surpassed anywhere. The same character is found in the Guest Chamber, which has a magnificent stone chimney-piece of bold, simple, and original character. The fluted piers, the ornamental panels, the brackets, and the cornice, with its singular ropework pattern and its dentils, are all most admirable.

We illustrate one other apartment, known as the Raleigh Room, to which reference has already been made, and concerning which there is a most interesting tradition. It is said that here Sir Walter Long and Sir Walter Raleigh used to meet and talk while they smoked out of silver pipes, and that South Wraxall Manor House is the first English house in which tobacco was used. Many, of course, are the anecdotes concerning the introduction of the fragrant weed, as for example that Raleigh smoked his first pipe on an island rock in one of the lower reaches of the Dart. The fireplace



THE CHIMNEY-PIECE IN DAME ELEANOR'S ROOM.

in the Raleigh Room is in an earlier style, with a low Tudor arch, its spandrels filled with fine carving of initials, tied with true lovers' knots. The original panelling seems to have been of the linen pattern, as has already been said, the later pieces having been introduced apparently in the seventeenth century.

From what we have said it will be seen that South Wraxall Manor House stands very high among the old houses of England. It is fortunately in excellent hands, and is even now regaining something of its older character. Certainly, with the lapse of time, the ancient manor house loses nothing of its varied charm. At a short distance from it are the remains of a

very curious hospitium, or guest house, of the thirteenth century, which was dedicated to St. Auduen or Owen, and consisted originally of a chapel, a hall, and a dwelling-house for the reception and entertainment of wayfarers. It was turned into an ordinary dwelling-house in the seventeenth century, and has been further modernised, after being used as a farmhouse. There is a fine stone screen of foliated arches remaining, but almost concealed in the more modern parts of the house. In few places in England are the evidences of ancient social life and hospitality so plainly visible as at South Wraxall, and we are peculiarly gratified at being able to illustrate the splendid features of the Manor House.