

BRAMALL HALL, CHESHIRE.

THE ancient seat of the Davenports, after passing, some years ago, through a critical period in its long history, has now fallen upon good and seemly days. The line of its old possessors is no longer represented there, but, in the hands of Mr. Nevill, who purchased it, it is safe from some dangers that threatened it, and is maintained with judicious care and with a true love for its great and beautiful features. It certainly ranks among the most interesting of the old half-timber structures of Lancashire and Cheshire, and stands in an advantageous situation, two miles and a-half south of Stockport, elevated on a terraced knoll, commanding a view of the Lyme Hills, with trees clustered about it, and a slope below to a little stream in the park.

At the end of the fourteenth century, the elder co-heiress of Geoffrey de Bromale, whose family took its name from the place, having married John de Davenport, the estate passed to the family which continued to hold it until a few years ago. The new owner, who died about the year 1400, was followed in possession by his descendants, until the estate came to Sir William Davenport, who was knighted at Leith, near Edinburgh, in 1544. Long before this time Bramall Hall had risen upon the hill.

It was in the time of Sir William Davenport and Dame Dorothy, his wife, between 1590 and 1600, that the house was subjected to considerable changes, which gave it almost the aspect it bears to-day. We shall, however, before describing



THE GREAT HALL, EAST SIDE.



THE INNER HALL.

the place, say something concerning its possessors. William Davenport, son of Sir William Davenport, sided with the Royal party in the Civil War, and suffered considerably in consequence, for the country thereabout generally favoured the Parliament. Some of his friends were on that side, and one of them, Sir William Brereton, actually quartered troops in his house and seized arms out of it. Ultimately Davenport was charged with delinquency against the Parliament, and was mulcted in a fine of £750. His descendants in the male line continued to hold the place until William Davenport, dying in 1829, left no legitimate issue, but adopted two daughters, of

whom one married Captain (afterwards Admiral Sir) Salusbury Price Humphreys, who took the name of Davenport in 1838. This gentleman's grandson succeeded to the estate on attaining his majority, but it was heavily encumbered, and was sold in 1877, being afterwards purchased by Mr. Nevill.

The main front of this fine timbered structure faces the east, and has at the back, on the west side, a courtyard, of which three sides remain. Traces of alterations are found in the house, and the Great Hall and the Withdrawing Room over it appear to be of later date than the south wing. The more exposed parts, particularly

on the south side, have been rebuilt in brick, though much of the ancient timber is there.

On approaching the courtyard the whole range of buildings is clearly seen, and the beautiful and picturesque character of the work is most attractive and impressive. In the midst, the Great Hall is conspicuous with its fine bay and porch, while the Banqueting Room is in the south wing on the right, and the servants' hall and kitchen quarters in the north wing on the left. We enter through the gabled porch and reach the Great Hall, which is characteristic and beautiful, but differs from like apartments in

many houses in being comparatively low, the height from floor to ceiling being about 12ft., and there is no minstrels' gallery. The size of the room is some 36ft. by 26ft. The bay is a half octagon, and opposite to the window is a grand arched fireplace, splendidly moulded and carved, adorned with arms and armour, and enclosing a cosy ingle-nook. The windows of the Hall have most beautiful ornamental lead-work. The central window has seven lights, with wooden mullions, divided by a transom, while the projecting bay has fifteen lights in all. On the east side is another window,



THE DRAWING-ROOM, WEST SIDE.



OLD LEAD-LIGHTED WINDOWS.

which is rather unusual, with painted glass, displaying the arms of Davenport.

Opening out of the Great Hall, at the south-west corner near the bay, and behind the high table, is a passage-way or ante-room leading to a fine staircase, which is circular and constructed of solid oak. On the left of this

staircase, on the ground level, is the Chapel, which is rectangular and about 40ft. by 20ft. The chancel is indicated by the character of the fittings, and the Chapel is divided into six bays by stout oak beams, their ends supported by strong uprights. The east window on the south side has some interesting stained glass, representing the Crucifixion, and in the other windows is more good glass. The woodwork is interesting, and in a seat on the left on entering is very elaborate oak carving, with the Plantagenet badge of the rose and fetterlock under the crown, and fine Perpendicular cresting. Opposite to the Chapel is a fine chamber, which has a good timbered ceiling of a similar character.

We may now pass up the main stairway, also with its steps of solid oak, leaving on our left the entrance to the north wing, which contains some fine panelled bedrooms, and reach



THE DRAWING-ROOM, EAST WINDOW.



BRAMALL, HALL.

THE GREAT HALL, WEST SIDE.

the Withdrawing Room, which is over the Great Hall, and was built in Elizabeth's time. It has a beautiful window corbelled out on the east side, which, with four other windows of varied form, gives the place both internally and externally a very pleasing character. The walls are panelled with oak, and the ceiling is enriched in plaster. The size of the room is that of the Great Hall below, the details are very quaint, for the panelling rises almost to the ceiling, and the intervening space has the arms and alliances of the Davenports in plaster. The mantel is chiefly of wood and plaster in blue and gold, and has the arms of Queen Elizabeth within the garter, the lion and dragon being the supporters, while above are the words, "Vive la Royne."

Through a door in the Withdrawing Room an interesting chamber is entered, known as the Plaster Room, its floor having been formerly of that material, and next the Paradise Room is entered, which is small and wainscoted with oak. There are two windows, of comparatively modern date. Formerly there was a four-post bed in the room, with embroidered hangings. The needlework at

the head was very interesting, and represented the Fall of Man, and gave the name to this room. It was worked by Dame Dorothy, the wife of Sir William Davenport, and dated curiously: "W. D., 1610; D. D., 1614." This was bought by W. W. Bromley-Davenport, M.P., at the sale. The Chapel Room, over the Chapel, is an oak-panelled apartment, and at the head of the spiral staircase, in the south wing, is the so-called Banqueting Hall, 40ft. long by 19ft. wide, the last of the splendid chambers of Bramall which we shall describe. It has a fine open timber roof in three bays, with intermediate principal rafters, and quatrefoil and other panels. The architectural characteristics are extremely good, the two principal rafters being embattled, and the spandrels of the curved ribs most boldly carved with animals and foliage. The effect is very pleasing, and is enhanced by the character of a beautiful oriel which looks over the quadrangle, and is corbelled out upon a support richly carved with the shield of the Bramall family. The "Long Gallery"—added in Elizabeth's reign—was taken down in the eighteenth century, when it showed signs of giving way.



WINDOW IN THE GREAT HALL.