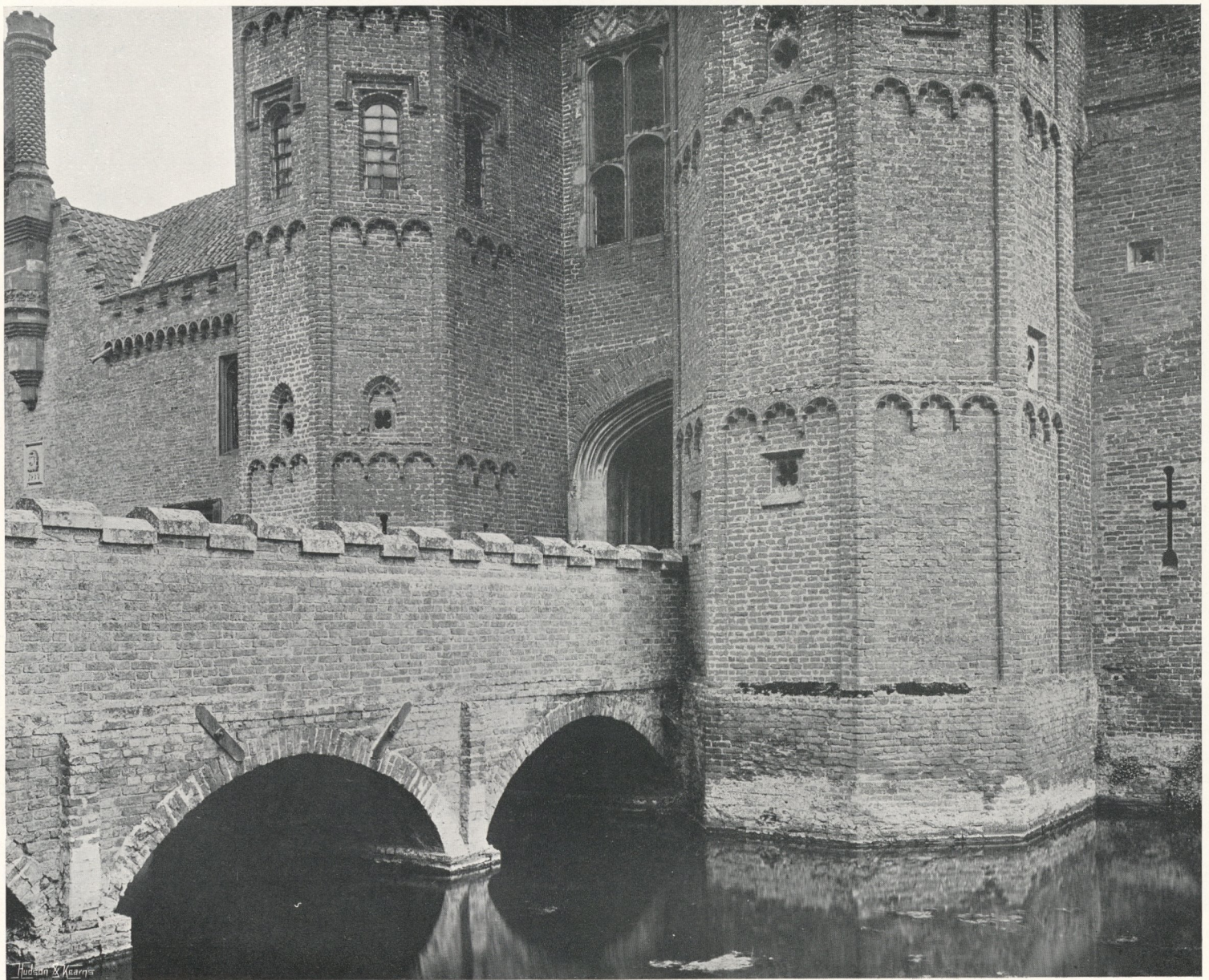


OXBURGH HALL, NORFOLK.

SIR HENRY PASTON-BEDINGFELD'S house stands in its broad and ample park, surrounded by its moat, and fortunate among all the houses of Norfolk. Its south wing was pulled down in 1778, but otherwise it bears the very aspect that it did when Sir Edmund Bedingfeld, the builder, was licensed by the last of the Plantagenets to embattle and crenellate. And yet only a few ruins mark the site of Oxnead, the once stately home of the Pastons; while Caister, where Sir John Fastolfe lived in state and splendour, has disappeared; and of the old house at Costessey, where the Jerninghams have lived since Elizabeth's days, of Kenninghall, and of Surrey's Mount, once the house of the Howards, not a

trace remains. Old memories of feud and broil are in the shire, and echoes may still be heard of the Wars of the Roses, and the days of the Parliament men, of brothers ranged on opposing sides in the strife, of lands sequestered, and of families undone. Fortunate, then, is it that Oxburgh still stands, and that the Bedingfelds remain. Many interesting things are in its history. There was always something of earnest zeal and strenuous purpose in the men of East Anglia. Here rose the strong wave of Protestantism that nerved the "men of religion" who were the very beginning of Cromwell's New Model Army, possessed with zeal that proved a match for the chivalry of the Cavalier. Yet the Bedingfelds at Oxburgh, the Jerninghams,



THE ONLY ENTRANCE.

Townshends, Yelvertofts, Wodehouses, and De Greys held to their ancient faith, and the county can show many a priest's hiding-place to-day.

Edmund Bedingfeld, knighted at the coronation of Richard III., was the builder of Oxburgh Hall, which he received permission to castellate in 1482—"that he according to his will and pleasure may build, make, and construct walls and towers with stone, lime and gravel, around and below his manor of Oxburgh, in the county of Norfolk, and enclose that manor with walls and towers of this kind; also embattle, crenellate, and machicolate those walls and towers"—and, further, he was to have a weekly market, to be held on Friday, together with a court of "*Pie-Poudre*," to which the disputants of the market-place, fresh from the dusty quarrel, with *pieds poudreux*, might resort for instant and ready justice from the seneschal.

The date of Oxburgh Hall is thus definitely known, though, if it were uncertain, we should be able to fix it approximately, owing to the characteristic features of the house being in the earliest so-called Tudor style. The great gate-tower on the north side is a grand turreted work of venerable brick, with two lofty angle turrets, comparable in some ways to the famous tower at Layer Marney. In one of the turrets is a winding stair, and in the other are small apartments, vaulted and groined. We may still note the crenellations and embattlements of the builder, and in the spring of the great arch aloft from turret to turret, the machicolation which was to enable the defenders within to pour molten lead or missiles upon the heads of the assailants at the gate. There is also the quadrangular form of the house, and its enclosure by a complete moat, in which are reflected the picturesque walls, oriels, embattled gables, twisted chimneys, and other picturesque features.

There is a pleasant inner court, but unfortunately the great Banqueting Room on the south side, described by old Blomefield as 54ft. long

and 34ft. broad, with an oaken roof similar to that of Westminster Hall, "equal in height to the length of it, and having been lately very agreeably ornamented and improved," was improved out of existence altogether in 1778. An embattled wall and corridor took its place. Pugin says of the hall that it was furnished with two oriels or bays at the upper end and a screen at the lower, separating it from the lobby and kitchens in the usual fashion of ancient dining-halls. The effect of the removal of this imposing chamber was to make Oxburgh Hall a square of three sides facing the south, and having on the north the Entrance Tower and Porter's Lodge, with a modernised Dining Room, on

the west side the Library and Saloon with an ante-room, and on the east various offices. In a turret projecting from the east tower is the hiding-place in the wall, about 5ft. square, entered through a trapdoor concealed in the floor, the door being formed of a wooden frame enclosing bricks, centred on an iron axle, and contrived to open when pressed on one side.

King Henry VII. visited Oxburgh apparently in 1487, and still the "King's Room" is shown in the gateway tower. It is an extremely interesting and curious apartment, 33ft. long and 20ft. broad, and in every way an admirable

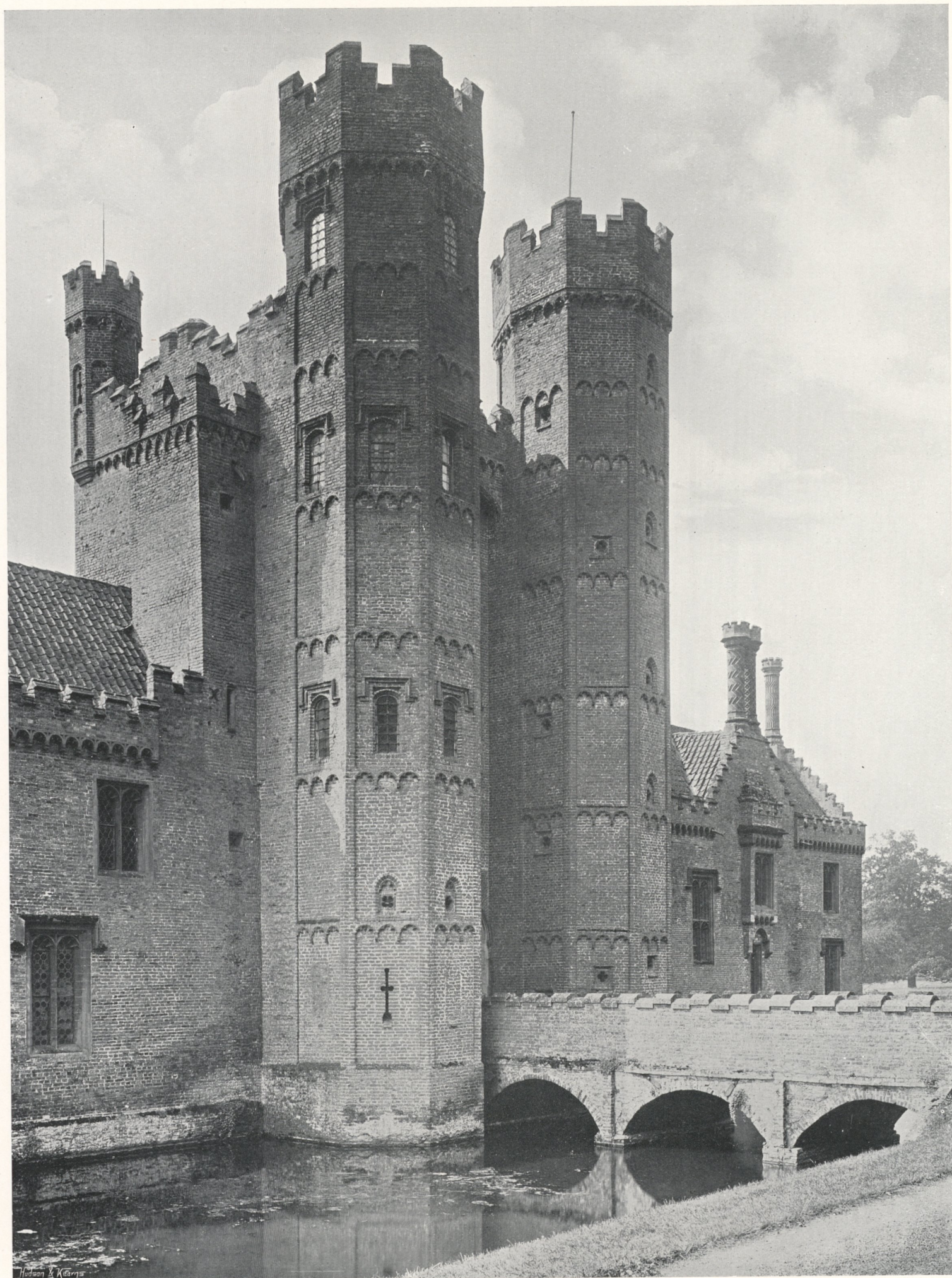
exemplification of the domestic interiors of its early time. The walls have the ancient linen pattern in the panelling and curious old tapestry hanging above, representing subjects which are uncertain, though in one an ecclesiastic seems to be giving his blessing to a king. The oaken bedstead has a coverlet and curtains of green velvet, with various devices of beasts and birds embroidered. They are named, as, for example, "a swalloe," "a leparde," and "th' ostrich," and are believed to have been worked by the hand of Mary Queen of Scots and Bess of Hardwicke, Countess of Shrewsbury, who was one of her custodians. Sir Henry Bedingfeld, grandson of the builder of Oxburgh, one of the



A WINDOW IN A CORRIDOR.



THE KING'S ROOM.



THE GREAT GATE TOWER.

gentlemen who appeared in arms at Framlingham in defence of Queen Mary, having with him 140 men completely armed, was afterwards taken into Elizabeth's favour, and made captain of the Guards, Governor of the Tower, and Vice-Chamberlain of the Queen. She was accustomed to speak of him as "her gaoler," because, before she came to the throne, she was for some time in his charge at Woodstock. There is no certainty as to how the Scottish Queen's embroideries came to Oxburgh, but it must have been in Sir Henry Bedingfeld's time. They bear her initials and the names of George and Elizabeth Shrewesburye. Elizabeth visited Bedingfeld at Oxburgh in 1578, and is said to have been lodged in the apartment over the "King's Room."

Sir Henry Bedingfeld's great-grandson, another Sir Henry, was raised to the baronetage in 1661, after the Restoration. The troubles of the Civil War had swept over the place, and, Sir Henry being a Cavalier, the estate had been seized by the Parliamentary Committee, because of his "treason against the Parliament and people of England," and, with other possessions, had been sold for the sum of £9,977 18s. 8½d. to William Holcroft and Geoffrey Northleigh, certain annual charges being laid upon it.

A little later, however, the Bedingfelds were enabled to buy back their heritage, and it has ever since remained in the hands of the family.

The house contains many interesting portraits, including Henry VII., William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk, Mary Queen of Scots, Sir Thomas Gresham (by Zuccherò), the Earl and Countess of Arundel (by Van Dyck), Secretary Cromwell (by Holbein), and others. The ancient furniture and decorations are also extremely interesting. The surroundings of the house are of gentle and attractive character. From the margin of the moat level lawns stretch away into the nobly wooded park, in which is a modern Gothic Roman Catholic chapel, for the use of the family and tenants.

Such, then, is this ancient Norfolk dwelling-place. It will be seen that what was said at the beginning—that it has been fortunate among all the houses of the county—is true, since its appearance has changed but little since the days in which it was built, and it is still an example of a style of which we have not too many in the country. The earliest Tudor forms in brick must, indeed, be sought chiefly in East Anglia, and Oxburgh Hall is an excellent type of their picturesqueness.