

OCKWELLS MANOR, BERKSHIRE.

IT is but a walk of some two miles through the water-meadows from the gateway of the Jesus Hospital at Bray, on the Thames, to the old house of Ockwells, and, as we see its ancient timber front, enriched beyond almost any of its compeers, rising above the hedgerows, we bethink us that it is something of a phenomenon that this quaint dwelling of wood should have kinship with another famous timber mansion standing far away—with the venerable Hall of Speke by the Mersey.

It was a member of the old house of Norreys, or Norris, of Speke, one Richard le Norreys, holding the sinecure office of "cook" to Eleanor of Provence, Queen of Henry III., that received the Manor of Ockholt, or Ockwells,

in Berkshire, at a fee farm rent of forty shillings, in 1267. Here the King is said to have had a hunting-lodge within easy reach of the Royal Castle of Windsor. More than a century after Richard le Norreys, the "cook," had received the manor in fee, it fell to John Norreys, second son by his second marriage of Sir Henry Norreys of Speke. This John must be regarded as the real founder of the great line of the Berkshire house of Norreys, which gave many notable men to the State. John's half-brother, William, was the great-grandfather of another John Norreys, who established a second family of the name at Fyfield, also in Berkshire. The great-grandson of John whom we have described as the "founder" of his family upon the acres by the Thames, was the



THE DRAWING-ROOM.

builder of Ockwells Manor House. He also bore the favourite name of John, and was a very important man in his time, standing high in the favour of the Court, and having the ability to steer his ship adroitly amid the shoals and in the strong and troubled currents of the Wars of the Roses. He was First Usher to the Chamber in the reign of Henry VI., Squire of the Body to the King, Master of the Royal Wardrobe, Sheriff of Oxfordshire and Berkshire in 1442 and 1457, and Squire of the Body to Edward IV., being afterwards knighted.

So important a man must needs have an important house, well fitted to receive his guests, and so it came that Ockwells was built. Few people realise what it was to raise in those days so glorious a house. There was something in the operation analogous to the building of a ship—the same need for seasoned oak, the same labour with saw and adze, the same pegging of joint and tenon, and so the structure rose complete and solid. There was superadded the fine craft of the carver, the loving labour of the man who fashioned the cusped window-frames, the magnificent barge-boards and the finials. Then

came the glass-stainer with his splendid blazonry, to flood the rooms with colour, and the tapestry, often from distant looms, and the ladies in their bower working at fair embroideries for the adornment of the abode.

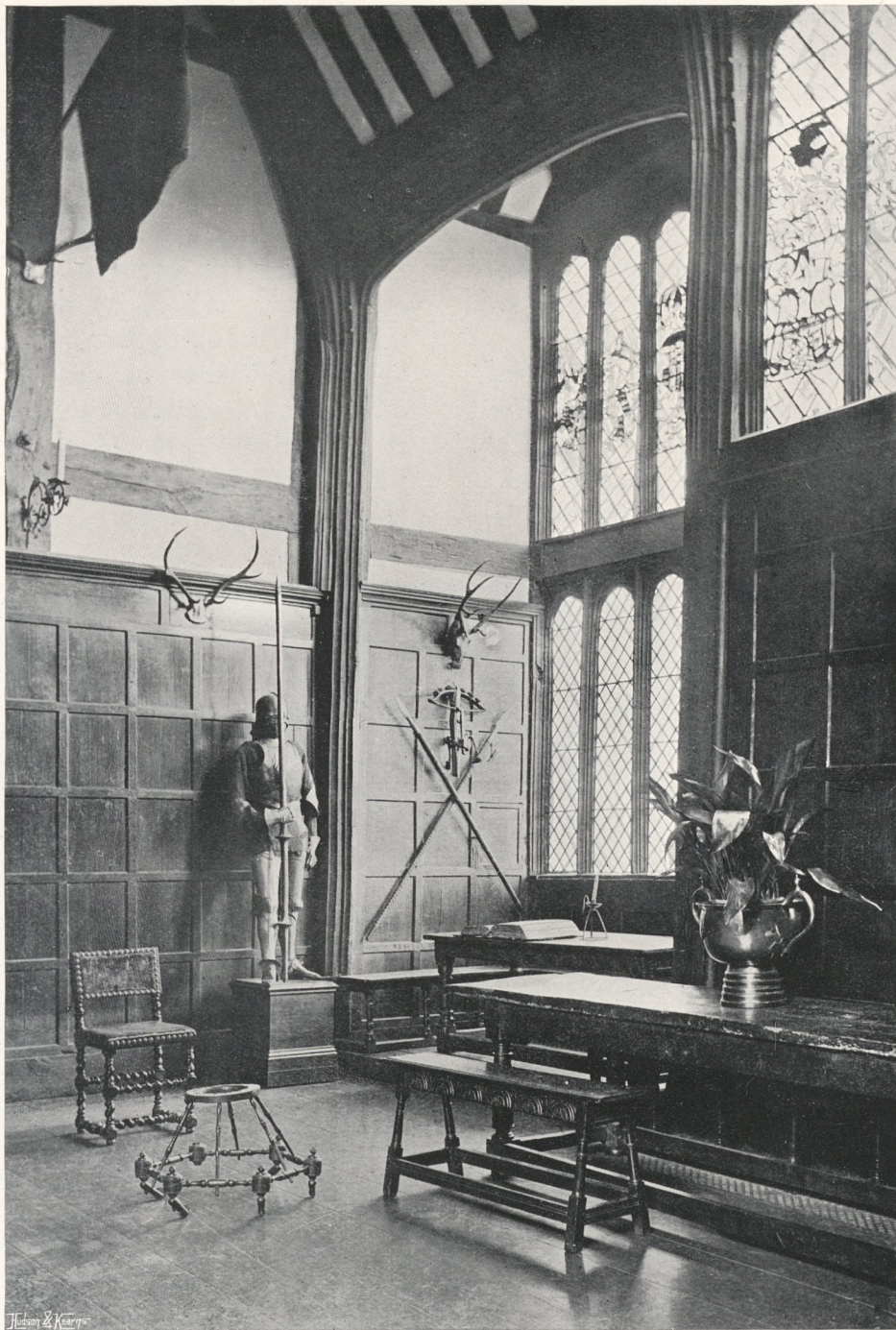
Mr. Parker of Oxford, that eminent authority on English mediæval architecture, who described Ockwells about half a century ago, found the place then decayed from its former state, dilapidated and reduced to the condition of a farmhouse—now most happily regenerated—but he recognised its superb architectural

character, and illustrated the magnificent detail of the admirable barge-boards and the remarkable Perpendicular panelling of the timber gables, describing its nearly perfect state as a house of the time of Edward IV., with its grand Hall, open roofed, its splendid painted glass, and its antique air, and the quaint buildings surrounding the small courtyard, the Hall being on one side, with a double wooden cloister, one range over the other. We give an illustration of the exterior of the house to show how

rich and beautiful is the work, and it will be noticed that the character is purely Perpendicular, with a low-arched doorway leading to the lobby, which, in the ancient manner, separates the Hall on the one hand from the domestic offices on the other. The beautiful oriel windows, with their narrow cusped lights, and the remarkable elaboration of the gables will be noticed, as also the quaint side of the Hall, with the gabled bay which lights the upper end, where the high table was upon the dais.

Ockwells, as figured in Nash's "Mansions of England in the Olden Time," has a charm of simple antiquity which invests it to-day. Still it has its old quadrangle, with

passages around three sides of it, still the splendid Hall, the quaint buttery hatch, and all the architectural features which then distinguished it, recovered from some state of decay, and as fair as ever it was in its early prime. It is not the purpose here to recount family history, but a little more shall be said of the Berkshire house of Norreys. The builder of Ockwells Manor House was twice married, his first wife being Alice Merebrooke, who brought as her dowry or heritage the manor of Yattendon in the same county; and his second wife



THE RECESS.



PART OF THE EAST FRONT.

*THE STAIRWAY.*



THE GREAT HALL.

Millicent, the daughter and heiress of a member of the family of Ravenscroft of Cotton End, Hardingstone, Northants. The knight died on September 1st, 1467, and was buried in an

William Norreys, from whom were descended the more famous members of the house, succeeded to the Yattendon estate.

The old house of Ockwells, whose later



THE HALL SCREEN.

aisle of the church at Bray, which he himself had built. He was succeeded at Ockwells by his son John, who was Sheriff of Oxfordshire and Berkshire in 1479, while another son, Sir

history shall not be recounted, passed from the family of its builder to one bearing the name of Fettiplace, and, after going through many hands, was reduced from its high estate, as has



THE GALLERY IN THE HALL.

been described. Mr. Stephen Leach, when a boy at Eton, some years ago, made sketches of the house, and took so great a delight in it that he determined to buy it and restore it if he ever had the opportunity. Mr. W. H. Grenfell was at that time the owner,

and the house was leased to a tanner of hides, and was in rather a deplorable condition, both from want of repairs and some horrors added by the tenant. When it was put up to auction Mr. Leach bought it, and committed to Mr. F. B. Wade the very interesting but also most difficult task of restoring it. To Mr. Leach the credit is due of having preserved one of the most interesting houses in the country,

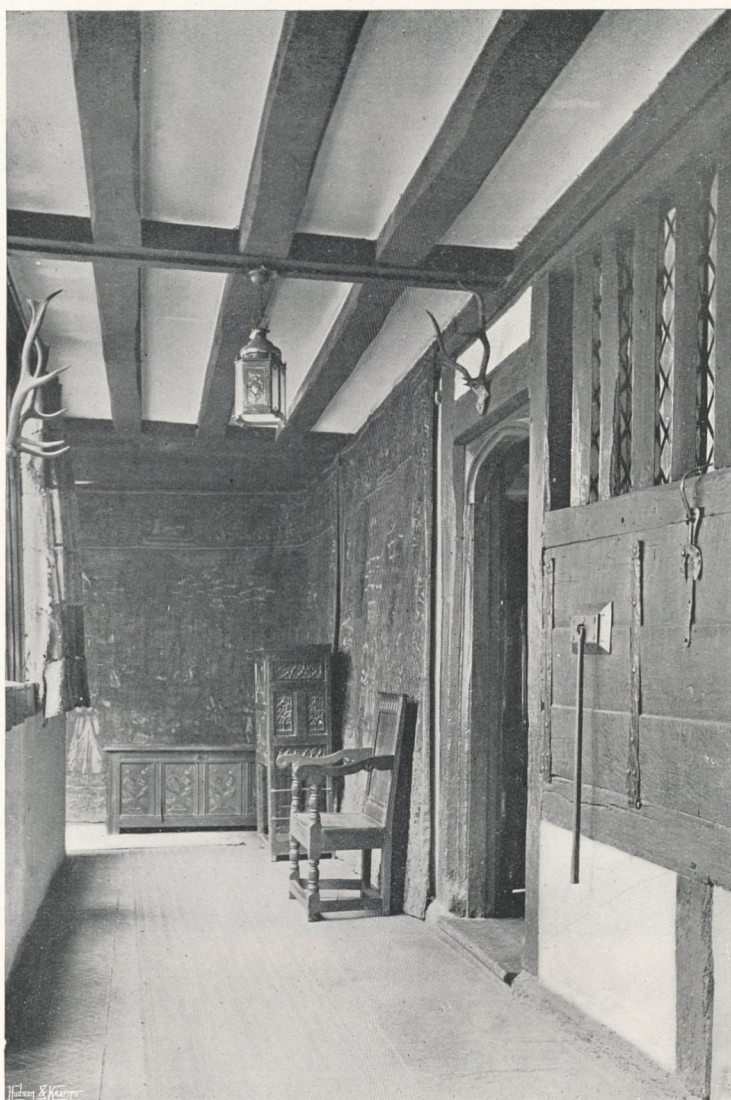


STAINED GLASS—THE HALL WINDOW

and to his architect of destroying nothing and sparing everything. Mr. Leach eventually sold it to the present owner, Mr. Edward Barry, who has continued the work so well begun, introducing no jarring note, but making it the beautiful abode we

depict. A wing has been added on the north side in absolute harmony of style, and now Ockwells is one of the most delightful of all the earlier houses of England.

The Great Hall is still the most interesting feature of the old structure, and perhaps nothing in it is so interesting as its wonderful old armorial glass, some of which we illustrate. The Royal associations of the builder are exemplified, for



THE BUTTERY HATCH.



THE SOUTH PASSAGE.



THE DINING-ROOM.

here are the arms of Henry VI. and his Queen, Margaret of Anjou, with the coat of Norreys many times repeated, and their old motto, "Feythfully serve," as our picture of the Hall window shows. The Hall has its splendid oaken roof, many-beamed, with moulded ribs rising from the fine panelling of the lower walls and the floor. The fireplace, with its flattened arch, the splendid bay window, with its arched lights in two ranges, the long window on the same side, the ancient armour, and all the features carry back the mind to Plantagenet times. As may be seen, the furniture is quite in harmony with the style of the house. At the lower end of the Hall—the end opposite to the place of the high table—is the characteristic screen, with its openings to the lobby and buttery hatch. Through this way came the serving-men with the baked meats for the knight's table.

We shall leave our pictures as sufficient

description of the house in detail, being content to draw attention to the exceeding quaintness of the corridors and the unspoiled charm of the place. The staircase is singularly picturesque; the Dining Room grand in its simplicity of rich-hued oak and its raftered ceiling; the Drawing Room revealing a slightly later taste of Elizabethan or Jacobean times, and its walls covered with splendid Spanish leather; and the Billiard Room with a mantel-piece completely charming in its appropriateness of style. Enough has been said to make it clear that Ockwells Manor House is among the most remarkable of all old English dwelling-places. Very few of them have been so little changed, and not many have been so judiciously dealt with in restoration. So true is this that, if Sir John Norreys, the builder, could visit the scene of his earthly sojourn, he would find little changed in his ancient and beautiful abode.



THE BILLIARD-ROOM CHIMNEY-PIECE.