

COLESHILL HOUSE, BERKSHIRE.

THIS beautiful, and in many ways remarkable, house, which is located in a parish in Berkshire, stands elevated upon the brow of a hill in its fine park of some 300 acres, and commands a romantic prospect of the richly-wooded country towards Highworth and the plain

to the north-west. It has the great distinction of being a work of the ripest talent of Inigo Jones, erected in 1650, but two years before the death of that eminent architect. Hereabout had been seated from mediæval times the wealthy family of Pleydell (though Coleshill came to them

later) whose ultimate heiress, Harriot, daughter of Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell, Bart., married in January, 1748, as his first wife, William Bouverie, Viscount Folkestone and Baron Longford, who was created Baron Pleydell-Bouverie of Coleshill and Earl of the County of Radnor in 1765. Sir Mark Pleydell lived until 1768, and it was not until that date that the estate came to the family of its present owner in the person of his grandson, Jacob Pleydell-Bouverie, Earl of Radnor. There are memorials of the Pleydells in the interesting old church of Coleshill, where Thomas Pleydell founded a chantry in 1499, which was rebuilt as the south chapel by Sir Mark Pleydell in 1738.

Coleshill House, however, had been a possession of the Pratts, and had come to the Pleydells through a marriage, in 1666, with Mary, sole daughter of Sir George Pratt, this lady being subsequently heiress of her brother, Sir Henry Pratt. It appears to have been Margaret, wife of Sir George Pratt (which Margaret continued in possession until 1698), who caused Coleshill House to be built from the designs of Inigo Jones. In 1648, after compounding for his part in the Civil War, the great artist went to work again, and, says old Aubrey, the south



THE GALLERY OF THE HALL.

*THE SALOON.*

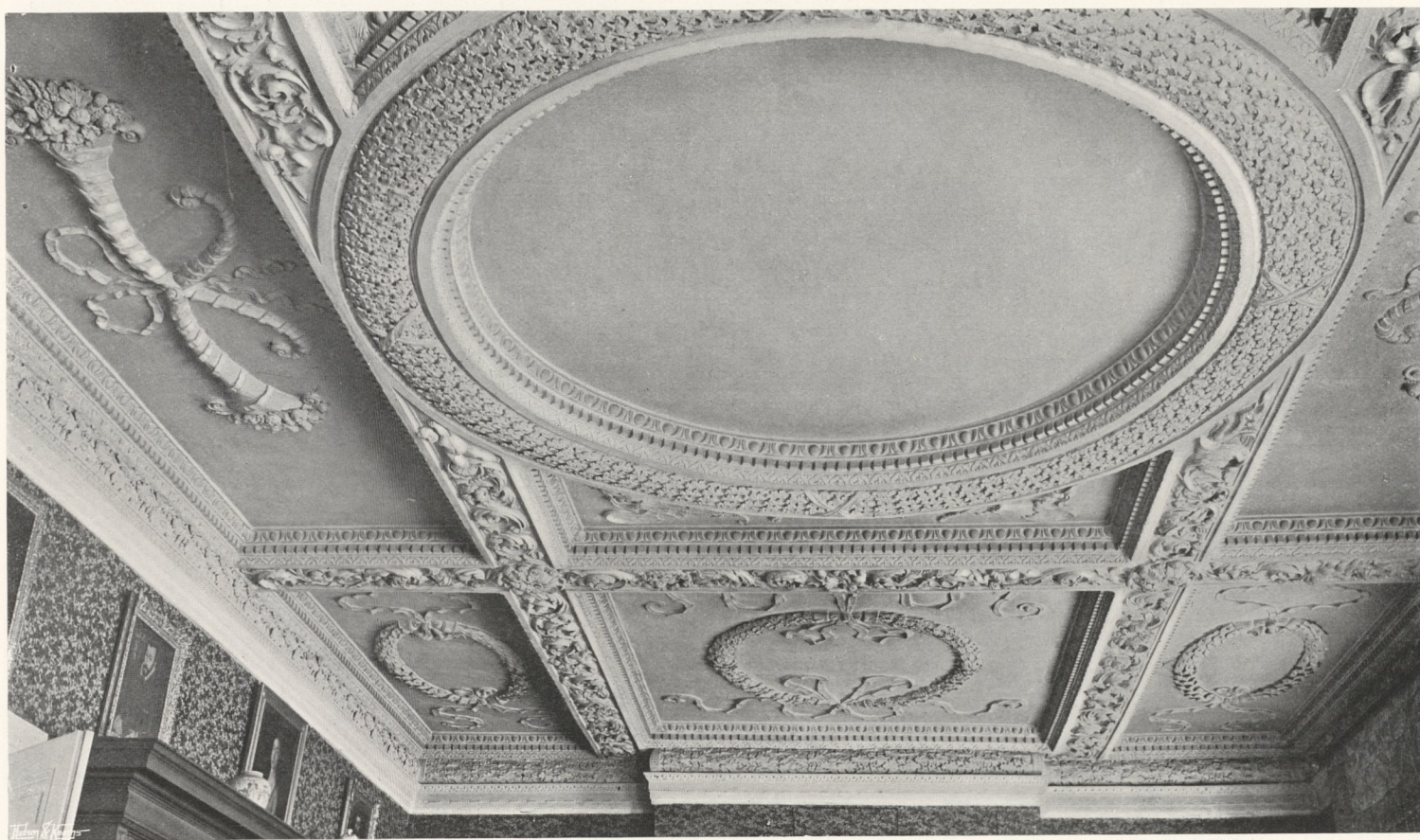


THE CEILING OF THE SALOON.

side of Wilton was built by the "advice of Inigo Jones, but, being then very old, he could not be there in person, but left it to Mr. Webb." Thus, perhaps, Coleshill also, which must have been begun at about the same time, was erected under the superintendence of Jones's kinsman and assistant, Webb. However this may have been, it is universally admitted to be a pure example of the work of the famous architect, and it has continued almost unchanged since his time, though some of the internal work may be later. In elevation the house is simple, dignified, and imposing, its plan a perfect quadrangle, and it comprises a basement and two storeys. The doorway is in the centre, surmounted by a pediment, and is reached by a handsome flight of steps. The windows have bold casings, and there is a cornice at the foot

are on the exterior face. In the walls are lunettes, deeply sunk, each to receive the bust of a Cæsar enwreathed. Above, as below, the doorways are exceedingly handsome, and there is a grand enriched ceiling. The pictures will show that the house is remarkable for nothing so much as for its magnificent ceiling adornments, upon which the finest skill of the carver and modeller in plaster has been employed.

There is diversity in character, it is true. One room, the Study, might seem of earlier date. It has, at least, the elements of a slightly earlier style in its lovely mantel-piece with the coupled Ionic columns on either side, and the armorial form of the decorations in the panels above. And yet the details are all in the classic style, which assumed so light a grace in the hands of Inigo Jones and those who followed him skilfully. The



THE CEILING OF THE DRAWING-ROOM.

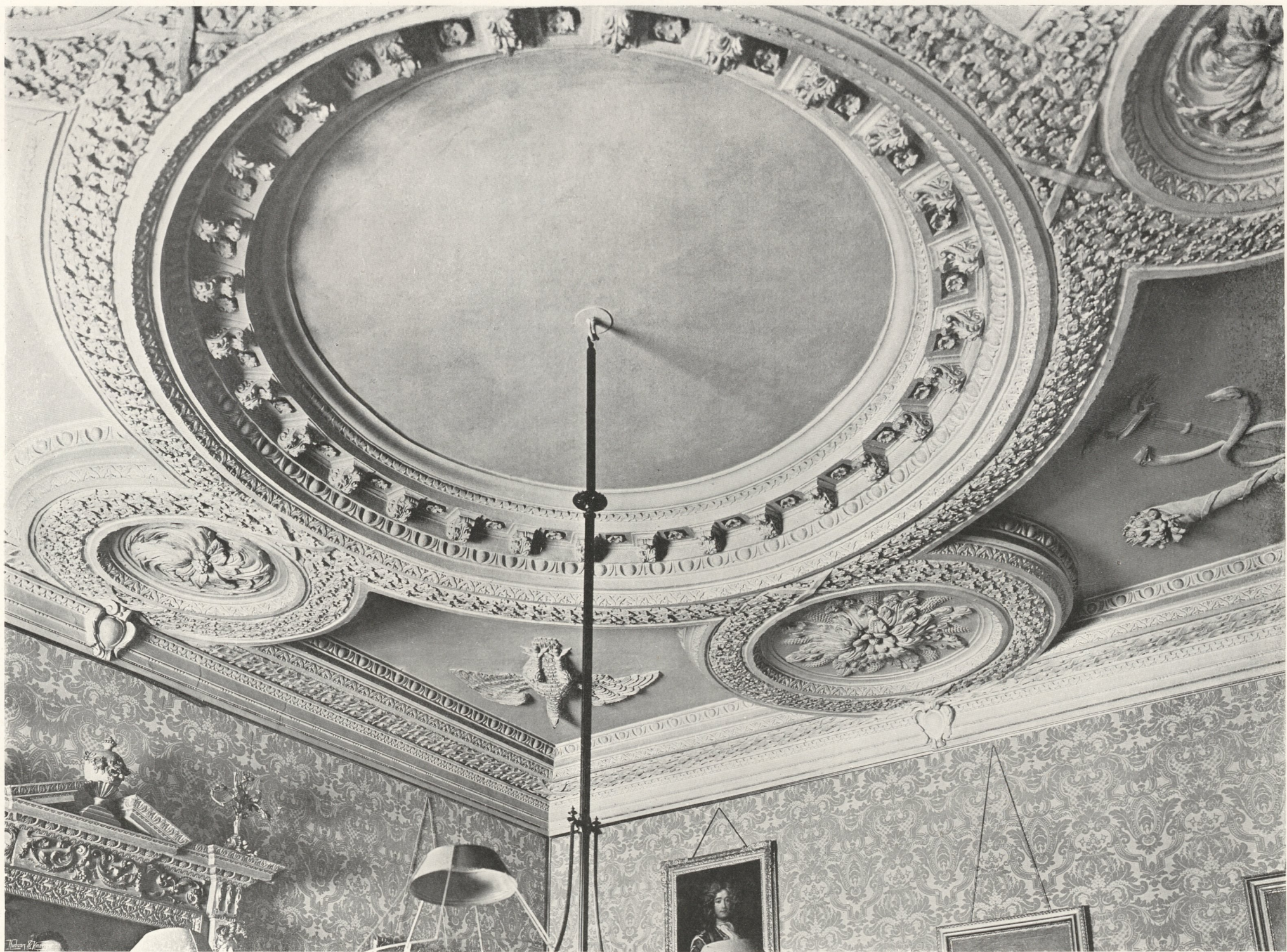
of a high sloping roof, which has dormer windows, alternately finished with elliptical and pointed pediments, and rises to a handsome balustrade. The chimneys are bold and striking, and add character to the symmetrical and highly satisfactory building.

The interior of the house is not less admirable in style, and is distinguished by equal simplicity and richness—simplicity in its bold forms, and richness in its elaboration of modelled work in plaster and other methods of internal adornment. The entrance is characteristic of the style, and with the grand staircase is particularly splendid in its subdued manner. There are niches in the walls, and the doors have fine casings and pediments. The double staircase leading to the Gallery is richly worked, with balusters of unusual form, and a handrail, while wreaths of fruit and flowers

spirit and charm of the free forms in the architrave and cornice are inimitable, and the panelling of the room is extremely good.

In the Saloon we have another mood of architecture altogether. Here the mantel has no reminiscence of the older forms, and is entirely classic both in form and details. The ceiling is truly magnificent in its enriched and elaborate kind. A wonderful oval occupies the centre, deeply sunk, its level surface supported, as it were, by brackets, below which is a superb design of fruit and leaves. The skill of the craftsmanship leaves us amazed, and it is found not less in the rectangular panels which fill the surrounding space, each with its wreath, and in the admirable cornice with its shield devices and its trails of fruits and flowers.

The room which is now devoted to billiards



THE CEILING OF THE BILLIARD-ROOM.

*THE STUDY.*



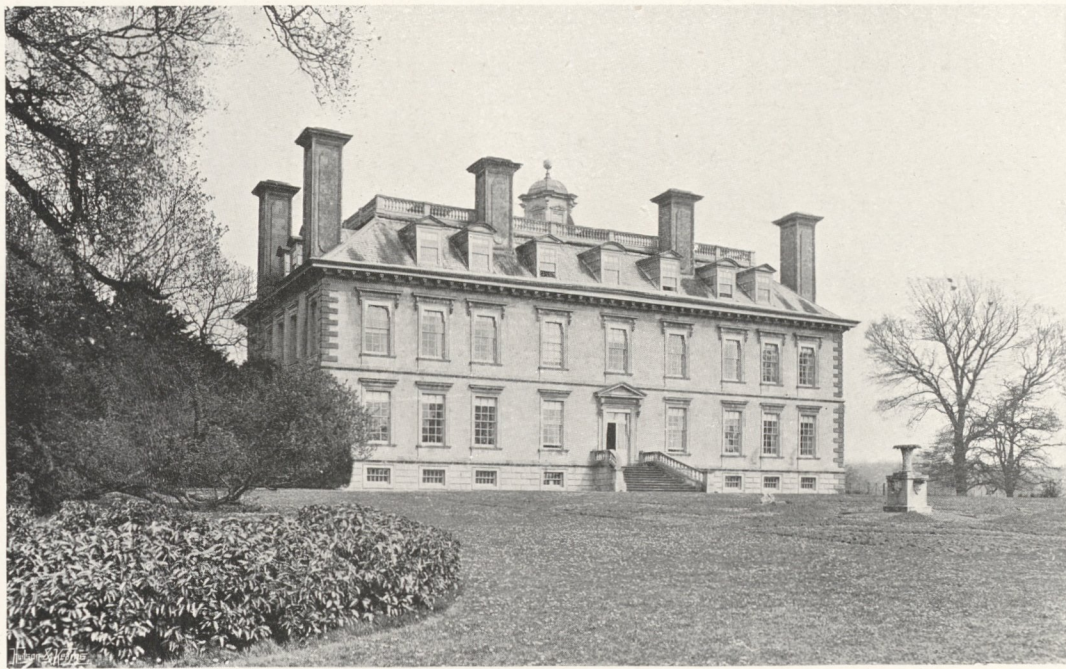
THE GREAT STAIRWAY.

is not less remarkable in its elaboration. Here the central device is a circle most richly worked in the same style, but with flowers and leaves, and there are other smaller circles, seen in one of the pictures. Special attention has been directed to the ceilings at Coleshill in the illustrations because of their uncommon character and very high merit. A great deal of excellent work in plaster has been depicted in these pages, but nowhere have we seen such an abundance of fine craftsmanship as at Coleshill. The art had been little known in the Middle Ages, and had rarely been practised, but there was new scope in the scroll patterns and panel enrichments of the Renaissance. Many workmen came into England from Italy skilled in such work, and from them the skill passed to our native modellers. We are not quite informed as to the actual date of these enrichments at Coleshill, but they may be a little later than the time of Inigo Jones, who died in 1652. For full a century later plaster-work was much employed in English houses with increasing skill, but it never rose higher than in its manifestation at Coleshill.

Not much remains to be said concerning

this remarkable house, save that it is plenished with much fine furniture, and that upon its walls hang many interesting portraits. Its grounds are beautiful and attractive and have interests of their own, for they are gloriously wooded, and were laid out perhaps a century since in the old landscape gardening style.

It is an interesting and attractive rural district, this borderland of Berkshire and Wiltshire. The village of Coleshill deserves notice. It is described as a model village, and has no inn to gratify the thirsty traveller. Most of the cottages were built of stone on a uniform plan by the second Earl of Radnor. The church, which has been alluded to, has Early English, Decorated, and Perpendicular features, and there are monuments of Sir Henry Pratt of Coleshill House, 1647, and of the Countess of Radnor, 1751, the latter by Rysbrach. Built by the Pratts and prized by the Pleydells, Coleshill House, in the hands of the Earls of Radnor, has been carefully preserved, and the Hon. Duncombe Pleydell-Bouverie has therefore a residence that deserves to be specially noted as an excellent example of a very interesting period of English architecture.



COLESHILL HOUSE.