HANFORD HOUSE,

DORSETSHIRE.

A VERY attractive part of the West Country is that in which this charming Jacobean house stands. The river Stour, flowing down from the high hills in the neighbourhood of Castle Cary, traverses a chalk region intersected by many valleys on its course to Blandford and Wimborne Minster, whence it reaches the sea at Christchurch. In all that district the tourist notices many beautiful seats situated on the hills or in the valleys, including Milton Abbey, Whatcombe House, Steepleton and Ranston. Among these, Hanford, which stands some two miles south-east of Hayward Bridge, is distinguished by its quaint, modest and attractive charm. It is an excellent example of an age which gave us much of the best in our domestic architecture, and, as all may see, nothing is wanting to its modern perfection. It has undergone reconstruction, indeed, and one very interesting change made in its internal arrangements has been the roofing-in of the little quadrangular court about which it was built, and the creation thereby of a great hall which is one of the most attractive apartments in the mansion. There may be those who might have preferred to see the house retaining its original character in this respect; but, after all, a house that is to be maintained must be modified to meet the requirements of those who live therein; and when taste and judgment preside over the work, as at Hanford, there is no cause for repining at what has been done. Here has been seated for centuries the family of Seymer, believed to have a common descent with the ducal house of Somerset; and it is presumed that the Seymers of Hanford held the estate under the abbesses of the neighbouring Cistercian nunnery of Tarrant, which was founded



NORTH-WEST FRONT.

by Ralph de Caneto in the time of Richard I., and re-endowed by Bishop Poore of Salisbury in 1217.

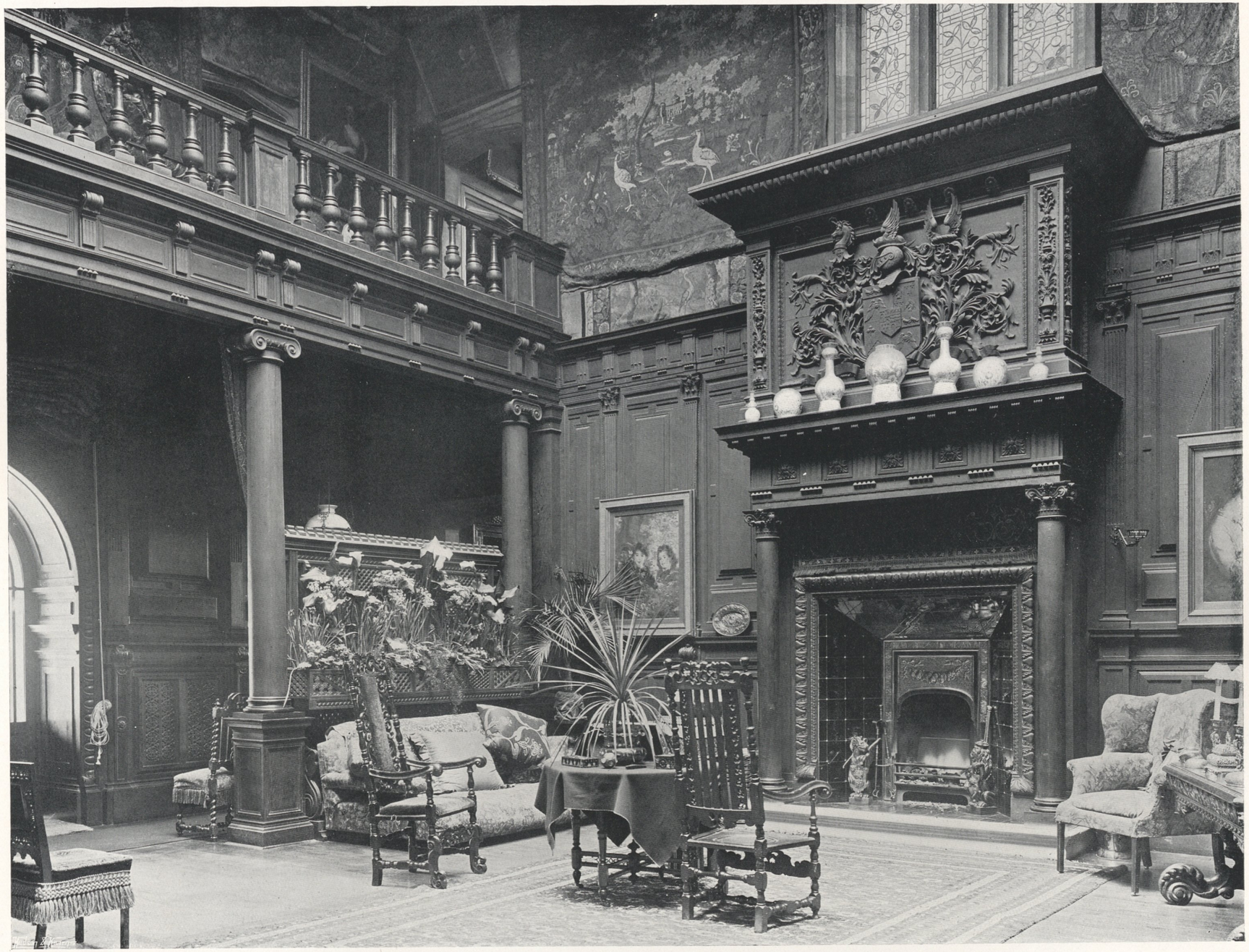
In the reign of Henry VIII. the lands, the manor and the residence then standing there, a Teller of the Exchequer, and an important man in his day, being knighted at Whitehall in February, 1619, and he died a few years later. The house was built in the early years of the seventeenth century, and was structurally



PORCH IN THE HALL.

with a fishery in the river Stour, were in the occupation of one John Seymer, and, after being possessed by the family of Daccome, the whole property was sold in Elizabeth's time to another John Seymer, who was the father of Sir Robert Seymer, the builder of Hanford House. He was completed before Sir Robert Seymer's death, though the date 1623, with the arms of England in a garter, are on a lead pipe of the time.

The character of the house is entirely satisfactory, and the grouping of gables and chimneys, combined with the pleasant hue of the



THE HALL GALLERY.

stone of which it is built, has a charm which is not easily described, but which will be conceived from the accompanying pictures. The main frontage is on the north-west side, where the entrance is through a round-headed arch which forms of the porch the main decorative and classical feature of the exterior elevation. It is a simple porch of its class, a class which often has abundant and massive pilasters carrying nothing at all. Here the conscientious designer ends up with a depressed pediment whose trespass upon the window-sill above it makes us almost wish it away. The mullioned windows and the adequate and comfortable bays—five sides of an octagon—on the north-east front admit a flood of light through their many-windowed walls.

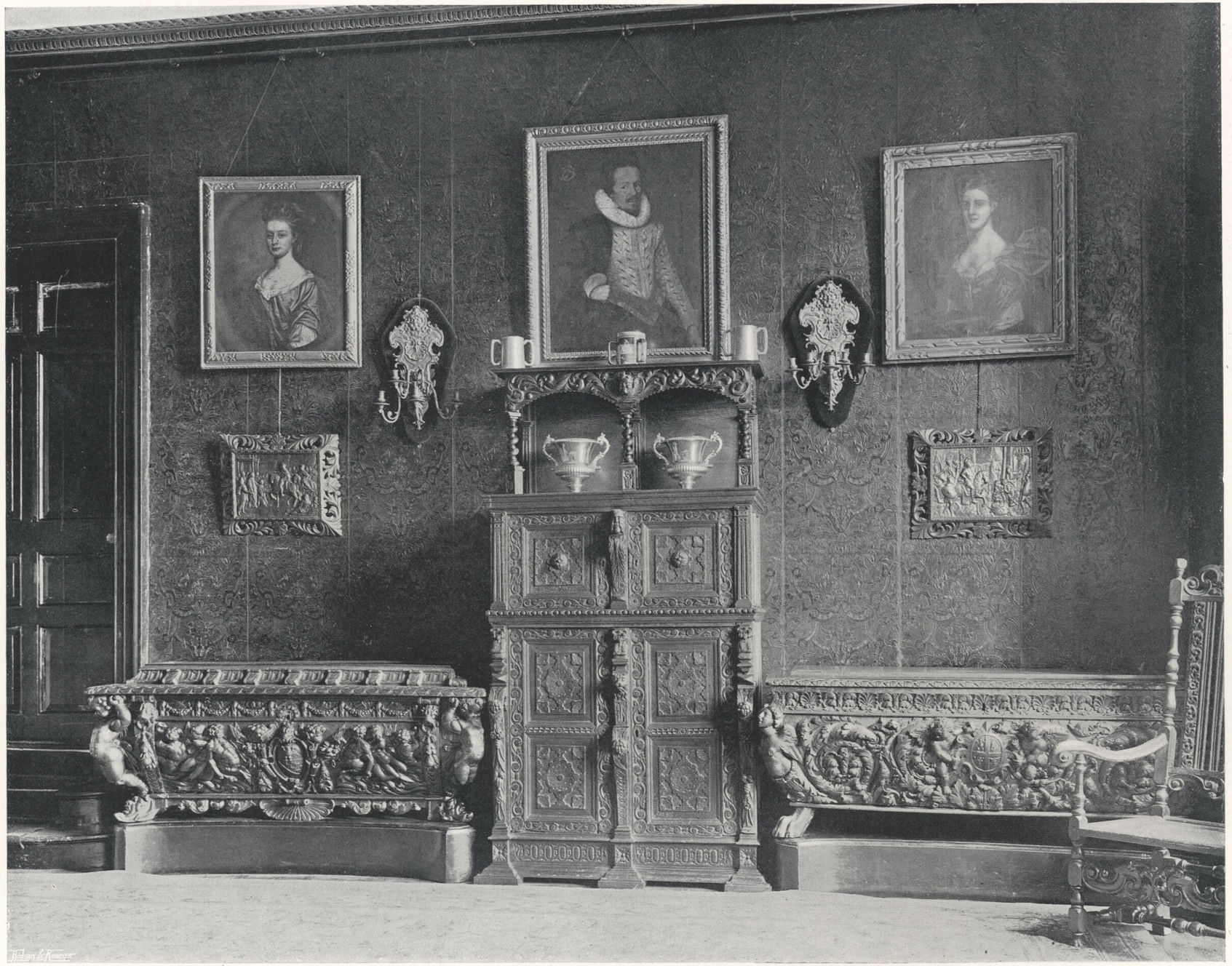


IN THE BILLIARD-ROOM.

Passing through the round-arched entrance, we gain admittance to what was originally the quadrangular court, and is now, as we have said, and as may be seen from the pictures, an important room of the house. The old porch is still there, and is a more elaborate and better-proportioned example than the exterior one, its fluted pilasters and cornice supporting a well-framed panel, whereon are sculptured boldly the arms of the family with their quarterings, and on the top is a couchant lion, just below the old mullioned window, which is filled with modern painted glass. This interior has been wainscoted in large panels, separated from one another by fluted Corinthian pilasters, and a balustered gallery is supported by Ionic columns. The fireplace and mantel are, of course, modern, but they are in excellent harmony with the character of the place, and the fine tapestry and portraits complete the features of a very attractive and original interior.

The dining-room has a pleasant aspect; its walls are covered with embossed leather, and its furniture is partly old English and partly richly-sculptured Italian, there being two noble chests with bold scroll carving and graceful amorini. Those who know the qualities and character of fine Renascence carving will recognise in the pictures the high value of these splendid coffers. In this room hang several family portraits, and, most interesting among them, one of Sir Robert Seymer of Hanford, the builder of the house, in slashed doublet and ruff, wearing a baldrick, and having a face which is characteristic, and evidently true to life.

The only other apartment which we shall mention is the billiard-room, which is made very remarkable by its sculptured mantel. Work of this class is well known in nearly every part of England; but there are few more characteristic examples of the style than this mantel at Hanford. Heavy carving of the kind is usually attributed to Germans or Dutchmen who came into England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as carvers and masons, and whose handicraft can be traced very plainly in some places. The Hanford mantel has terminal caryatides, the pedestals flat, broad and clumsily designed, while over the opening for the fireplace is very singular strapwork carving. An entablature with arabesques is above, broken by



PART OF DINING-ROOM.

three brackets supporting shell niches, each with two freely-treated Corinthian columns, and between the niches are two half-length Roman soldiers, in plate and scale armour, with helmets. The whole effect of the carving is most curious, and, though the work cannot be regarded as attractive, it is an exceedingly interesting example of the English Renascence, strongly influenced by Teutonic taste. Enough has now been said to show that the old house of Hanford, though neither large nor stately, deserves to rank very high among the quaint and attractive Jacobean houses of the West of England.



NORTH-EAST FRONT.