QUENBY HALL,

LEICESTERSHIRE.

WHAT different associations the same words conjure up in different minds, according to their bent and tendency! Mention Quenby Hall to the lettered architect, and he at once sees visions of a stately Tudor pile of buildings, of marvellous and harmonious brickwork faced with stone. Speak of it to the antiquary, and he thinks of one of the oldest English estates that until the present year has never for eight centuries passed out of the possession (although often out of the occupation) of one family. Pronounce the words in the hearing of a sportsman, and he is at once in the centre of some of the finest fox-preserves in the Midlands, which Alken's drawings of the Leicestershire coverts have immortalised, which the Quorn Hunt has "drawn" for generations past, and will, it is hoped, continue to draw for generations to come: the chorus of the hounds salutes his mental ears, and one of the biggest "fields" of horses and riders passes before his eyes at breakneck pace in the direction of Billesdon Coplow. Quenby Hall, from its lofty, isolated position, and its vast range of prospect over the surrounding country, dominates the neighbourhood of Leicester in a physical sense, as by its solid simplicity of architectural style, its prolonged association with the name of one family as its owner and its prominence as a hunting centre, it dominates the imagination of the dwellers in and around Leicester.

Quenby Hall is about seven miles from Leicester, and its approach is characteristic of the country, being by a bridle road—"long and



THE PORCH.

lean and lank"—running through grass fields for about a mile, some still showing marks of the old "ridge and furrow" system of ploughing and draining, the road interrupted by frequent gates,

As you enter the park—if so apparently wild and natural a domain deserves the name—you come upon irregularly planted lines of oak trees, with here and there a stray cedar as you



THE OLD CLOCK TOWER.

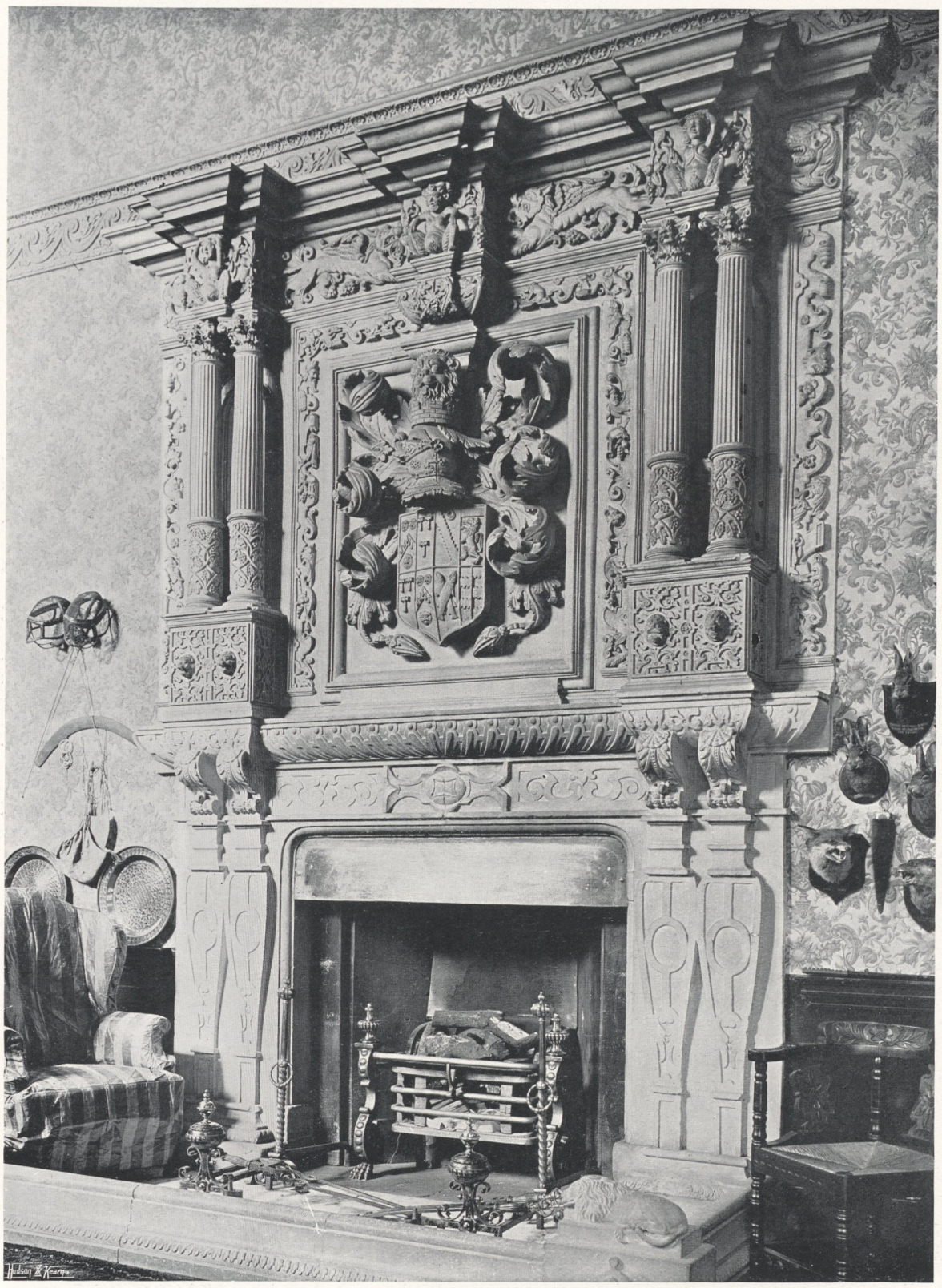
rendered necessary by the comparative scarcity of hedges, the opening and shutting of which said gates is a terrible trial to those who drive in groomless dog-carts.

near the last iron gate. This is of the smallest and simplest character, usurping the place of the discarded and still magnificent wrecks of the wrought-iron gates (worthy of Jean Tijou)



THE WESTERN FACADE.

which now stand as a model and pattern outside the Art Museum at Leicester. The Hall itself is set upon a vast walled platform or foundation, four square, except where rounded off at the entrance into the segment of a circle; and the outer rim of this platform forms on three sides a broad terrace-walk, raised a few feet above the surrounding country, from which it has hitherto been separated by no artificial barrier, but will



THE CHIMNEY-PIECE IN THE HALL.

now have a parapet. The story goes that as much money was spent upon the foundations as would have sufficed for the erection of the entire building.

A high flight of steps leads up to the arched doorway of the porch. Originally a second doorway was interposed before entering the hall, which was of the then somewhat novel single-storey height with a long gallery above. But in the eighteenth century, Shuckburgh Ashby, whom we revert to later on, removed the second porch door, and threw the porch into the hall. He also removed the intervening floor and gave the hall its present uncomfortable height and double row of windows. The ancient arrangement will, however, now be duly restored with great advantage to both appearance and convenience. Above the entrance is one coat of arms carved in stone, another higher up, then the clock, dated 1621, and the whole tower is surmounted by the ubiquitous Quenby lion head raised upon an arched base which holds the green bronze bell of the clock. But though clock and lion and bell are old, the portion of the porch which rises above the parapet was refaced with blue bricks some forty-five years ago. Drain-pipes with moulded heads alternate with the finely-proportioned mullioned windows, which five times reach forward in ample bays along the H-shaped elevation. In the right wing is the oak drawing-room, with arcaded Jacobean panelling, divided up by elaborately-carved pilasters, and topped by arabesque cornice and enriched plaster ceiling, the details of which are so beautifully brought out in Mr. Latham's photograph.

The year 1636 is given as the date of the present building, and £12,000 its cost. This conflicts with the dates of 1621 on the clock and on one of the rain-water pipe heads, and is late for the character of the work both within and without. It must apply to some finishing strokes of a rather belated and unimportant kind. Both of the very dissimilar chimney-pieces which we picture declare themselves of the age of James rather than

of his son, although, certainly, that in the hall is somewhat late and debased like that at Hanford; but the whole of the decorations of the drawing-room mantel, panels and ceiling

Some persons of taste may hazard the doubt whether the ivy which spreads almost over the whole front of the building as high as the tops of the first of three rows of windows is



A PORTION OF THE DRAWING-ROOM.

are of exactly similar type to those at Hardwick in Oxfordshire, which is dated from the closing years of Elizabeth, and an illustration of which appears in the Introduction.

a loss or gain, inasmuch as it acts as a beard upon a handsome face, obscuring the lines and expression of the mouth and chin, and interfering with the harmonious colouring of the

mellowed brickwork, and may even in time sap its very strength and stability. Especially on the western side, this might well be removed and give place to the more reserved growth of choicer subjects. One characteristic feature of the building we must not omit to note—the invisibility from any point of view of the flat leaden roof, which yet itself, when you mount up to it, affords such splendid views over the surrounding country. These, with its cedars and the superb colour of its bricks, which alone the brush of Time and Weather can fuse into such subdued and subtle harmony of tone, are the chief beauties Quenby can boast, although, high and exposed as the situation is, Mr. Peto's skill as a deviser of gardens will shortly add much additional charm.

We have it on the authority of John Nichols, the county historian, that the estate appears in legal records as early as the year 1247, and in 1304 a messuage was held by Richard de Asheby. Before the first year of the reign of Richard III., the manor of Quenby was in grant from the Crown to the Ashbys. As long ago as 1629 it was extant in the handwriting of one of the Ashbys: "It is 300 years since the first rise of the Ashbies. My father hath writeings ever since King John's dayes."

"According to the heraldic authorities, the ancient name of Ashby was 'Ashbowe,'" writes Mrs. Elizabeth Ashby in 1670, and true or not, this mere statement is now of the respectable antiquity of 234 years, and, therefore, difficult to controvert; and equally so her jeremiad over the scarcity of corn, barley being "five shillings a strike," which shows that the landed interest was subject to depression even in the good old days. The fourth George Ashby represented Leicester in Parliament in 1695 and 1707, and was High Sheriff in 1688; he was styled "honest George Ashby the Planter," and after this we hear with no surprise that he was a friend of John Evelyn, who visited him at Quenby. He it was, so runs the tradition, who planted nine fine cedars of Lebanon (not those still standing), probably from a cone brought over by his uncle, William Ashby, a Turkey merchant. These cedars took a chill when the other trees were removed to open up the view, and, dying off, they were converted into wainscoting for the east end of Hungerton chancel. An eye-witness describes the curious effect of their long dark branches sinking under the weight of a heavy snow-storm, and then suddenly, like the living things they were, releasing themselves with a spring and resuming their upright position, expanding like vast green umbrellas. For all its length of tenure and tenacity, the Ashby family has not produced an unusually large number of famous citizens, and in fact its representatives seem to have done little more in life than remain "nobly seated." One exception, however, in the way of rising, or at least of standing, was Shuckburgh Ashby (who died in 1792), who Arthur Young, in his "Eastern Tour," describes as having found the house a mere shell, and in a few years brought it into complete order, fitting up the rooms in "a style of great propriety"—they are, in all likelihood, his initials ("S. A.") which may still be descried upon a fine rain-water pipe head with the date of 1729—his furniture rich and some of it magnificent; his collection of prints an excellent one; and his library superbly filled with books chosen by "honest Tom Payne," who was probably responsible for the choice of the elegant bindings, and no doubt was thus distinguished from the greater but less sanctified Tom Paine of Revolutionary reputation.

It is only to repeat a commonplace to say that Leicestershire has been known time out of mind for the largest sheep and greatest fleeces. The first Stilton cheese of which there is record is supposed to have been churned by one Elizabeth Scarbrow (afterwards Orton), a housekeeper in the family of the Ashbys, who married and settled at Little Dalby in 1720. It was first called Quenby cheese, but later Stilton, from an innkeeper of Stilton in Huntingdonshire, upon the Great North Road, buying it in quantities and retailing it to travellers. It was made in most of the villages around Melton Mowbray, but it was impossible to get the secret from dairy people, probably because no two cheeses are alike. Nichols gives the following, obtained from Major Cheselden of Somerby by the Surveyor to the Board of Agriculture: "Take the night's cream and put it to the morning's new milk, with the rennet; when the curd is come, it is not to be broke, as is done with other cheeses, but take it out with a soil-dish altogether, and place it in a sieve to drain gradually; and, as it drains, keep gradually pressing it, till it becomes firm and dry. Then place it in a wooden hoop, afterwards to be kept dry on boards, and turned frequently with cloth binders round it, which are to be tightened as occasion requires."

Of late years the history of Quenby (apart from its hunting associations) has been rather connected with the lives of its tenants than its owners. One of these was the late Marquess of Waterford, who, finding that he was threatened with paralysis, got his doctor to patch him up till he had carried out his promise to entertain the Prince of Wales (the present King) in Ireland, and then shot himself rather than await a lingering death. It has, however, now been purchased by Mrs. Edward Greaves, whose great taste and knowledge are being turned towards the adequate renovation of this choice old house. It will soon rank, with her brother's fine Castle of St. Donats, as one of those places to which the word "restoration" may be applied as a term of praise rather than of opprobrium.