DORTON HOUSE, NEAR THAME.

THIS gabled mansion, built long ago, apparently upon the foundations of a still more ancient structure, stands in the parish of Dorton, which is bounded on the north-west by Chinkwell Wood, and the position is some eleven miles from Aylesbury in the sylvan county of Buckingham, famous for its beechen shade. The house has gone through several changes, and seems at sundry times to have been brought "up to date" by its possessors, though there is nobility in its bold seventeenth century frontage and much distinction in the chambers we illustrate.

Here in very ancient times that strong follower of the Conqueror, Walter Giffard, a great landowner in the shire, was in possession, and the place passed in the course of centuries through the hands of various members of the houses of Valence, Stafford and Devereux, until during the reign of Henry VIII. it was vested in the Dormers, who built the mansion that still remains. It is situated upon rather low ground, near the ancient church, with plantations and groups of forest trees for its neighbours. The structure seems to have been erected upon the old site at the beginning of the seventeenth century by Sir John Dormer, knight, and a large apartment, reputed to have been a chapel, was paved with square tiles bearing the arms of Dormer, and other devices, as well as a human eye in the centre of a star radiated, one half being plain and the other wavy. This was the crest of the Blounts, ancestors of Dame Katherine Dormer. On the principal staircase, which has very massive balustrades and an aspect of much nobility, is the date 1626. The estate continued with the Dormers until



DORTON HOUSE, SOUTH-EAST.

May, 1783, when it was conveyed to Sir John Aubrey, who had also Chinkwell Wood and lands in Brill in the same county. This Sir John Aubrey was the sixth baronet of Llantrithyd, Glamorgan and Borstall, Bucks. He represented

the year in which he purchased the Dorton estate, where he chiefly resided, dying there at the age of eighty-six, and leaving no son to succeed him.

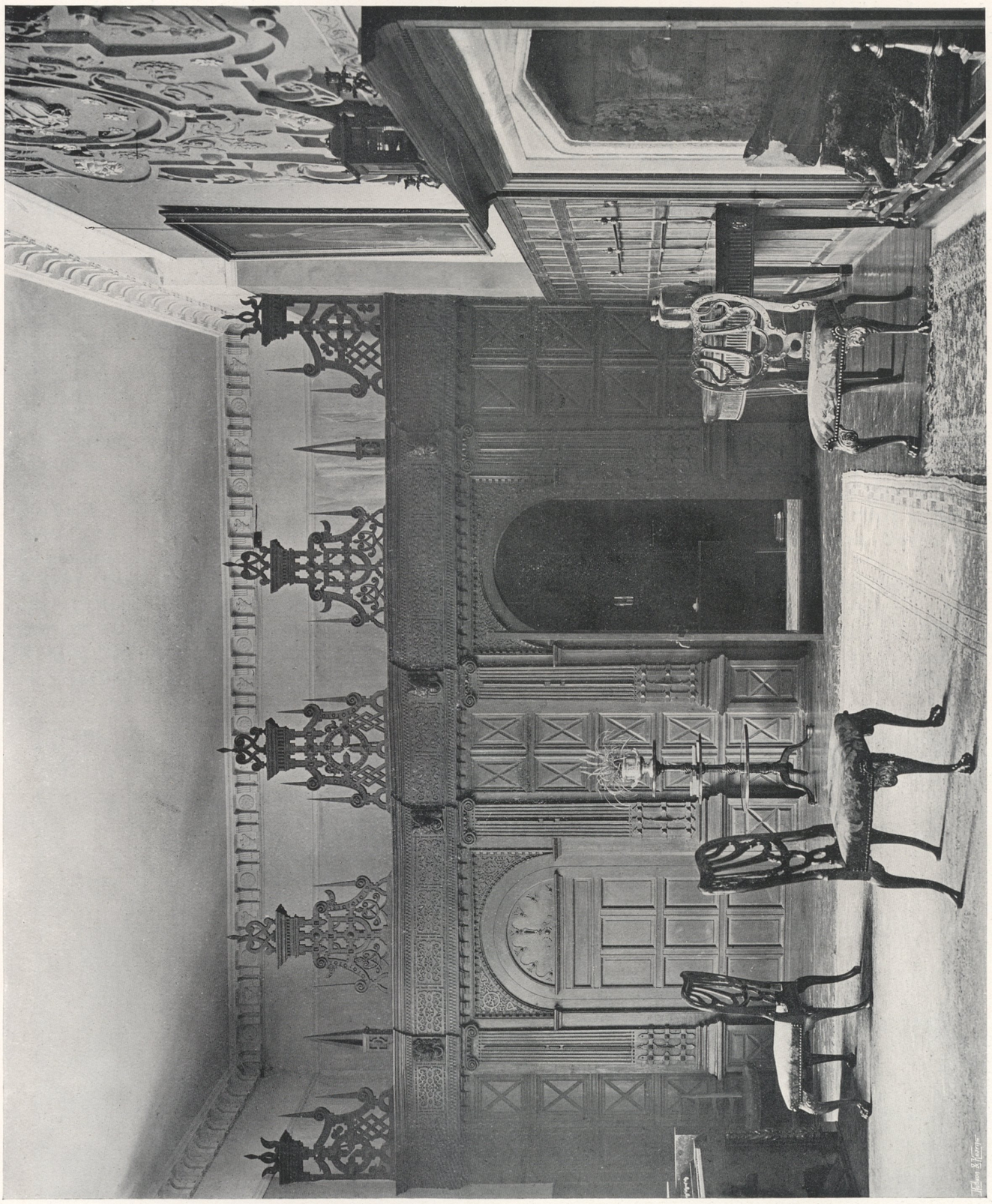
As regards the house, the local historian says that he modified and "improved" it about 1784,



THE OAK ROOM.

Wallingford, Aylesbury and other places in Parliament from 1768 until his death in 1826. He was a Lord Commissioner of the Admiralty in 1762, and became a Lord of the Treasury in

removing a lantern-shaped cupola, with a large clock, from the roof, and placing a balustrade on the parapet, which, with other alterations, gave it the rather lame appearance it presents in a plate



THE HALL.

in the pages of Lipscombe. Luckily, one or two rooms escaped Sir John's taste for "improvements." The hall ceiling and cornice are mean and incongruous, but the screen is original and singularly fine, quite the best bit of designing in its Renascence style of any, short of those in the introduction, which we include in this volume, though the Sizergh pediment and strap-work dragons may be finer work. The treatment at Woollas is very similar as regards its lower part, but there the upper part is a gallery front with balusters and pillars supporting the ceiling beam, in place of the elaborate obelisks and openwork pediments at Dorton, which remind us, in a humble way, of the larger and more important example in the hall of Wadham College. Woollas and Wadham are of exactly the same date (1611), and Sir John Dormer had probably done much other work before he placed the date of 1626 on the staircase. Whoever designed the hall screen designed the Oak Room mantel also, for its summit is ornamented in exactly the same way, and the entire design is shapely, well-proportioned and intelligently restrained. The coved ceiling has plaster-work of the best—not of the most elaborate, but of the most tasteful and refined, rising above a cornice of equal merit. The house is of brick, and originally, no doubt, had stone tiles on the roof; this is now of slates and the walls stuccoed. But the fine array of mullioned windows and the skyline of varied gables and well-placed chimneys are redeeming features.