WESTONBIRT HOUSE, GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

THE beautiful house of Westonbirt—standing high in the pleasant Cotswold country, in the very centre of the Duke of Beaufort's Hunt, where Silk Wood, adjoining the park, is one of the most famous fox coverts in England—is a modern creation, though, from its majestic style and architectural detail, it might well seem to date from the prime of the English Renaissance. The position is about equidistant from Gloucester, Swindon and Bath, and about four miles from the precipitous scarp from which one looks right across the Severn Valley to the Forest of Dean and the Welsh hills. Here, on the very border of Wiltshire, Hugh le Despenser was installed in possession in the time of Edward III., and after much time and several changes of ownership it came to the family of Crewe, whose heiress married Sir Richard Holford, Knight, descended from the ancient Cheshire family of Holford of Holford, who was appointed a Master in Chancery in June, 1693. This gentleman's son, Mr. Robert Holford, and his grandson, Mr. Peter Holford, both filled the same important office, the last of whom died in 1803. He was the grandfather of the late Mr. Robert Stayner Holford, who was High Sheriff of Gloucestershire in 1843, and represented East Gloucestershire in Parliament from 1854 to 1872. Mr. Holford was a man of elevated tastes, an intense lover of Nature and an enthusiastic planter and gardener, who made his estate of Westonbirt one of the most beautiful in that part of England.

We are now, however, concerned with the house itself, which, as all may see, is a structure



THE EAST ANGLE.

of great architectural merit. The first of its predecessors of which there is any knowledge was an old Cotswold manor house. Many of the class still remain, and their high gables, grey weather-beaten fronts and panelled stairways and rooms are the delight of lovers of the picturesque. The vale of Minety, between Tetbury and Cirencester, forming the watershed between two considerable rivers, turning the Avon to the west and the Bristol Channel, and the Isis, or rather the Thames, to the east and the North Sea. The old manor house, like its present successor, stood high

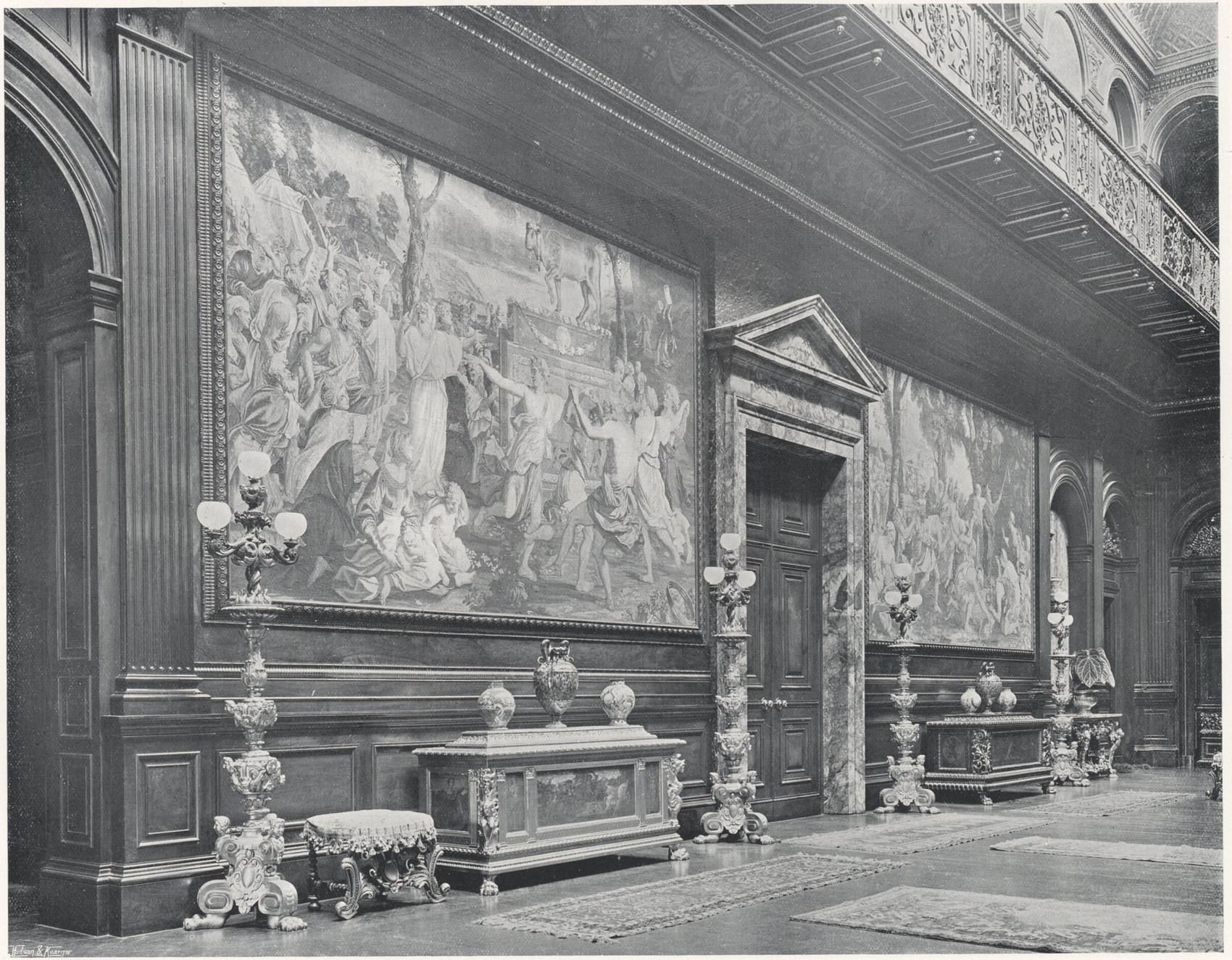


THE BOUDOIR.

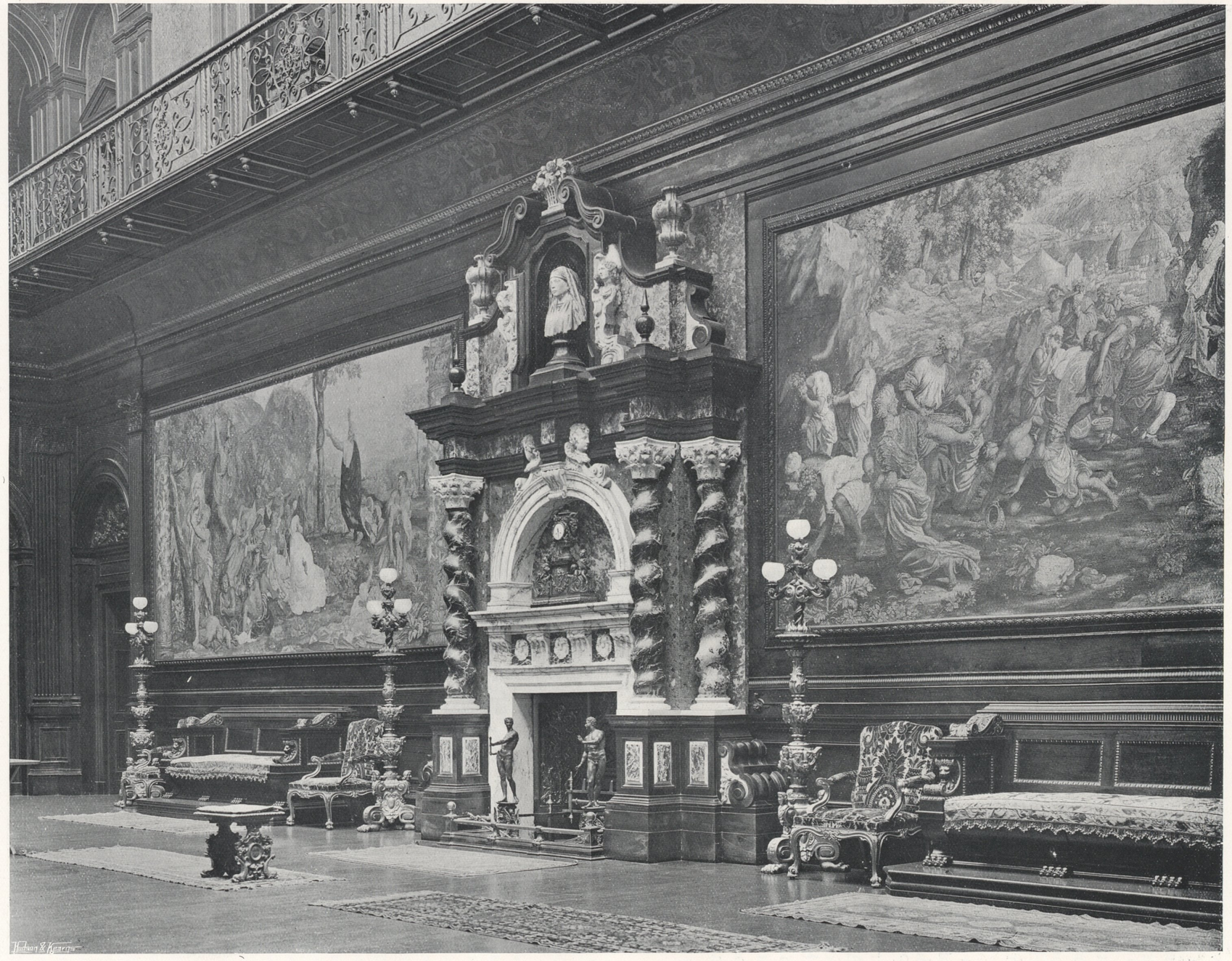
house stood not quite on the site of the present mansion, but very near it, and the situation was, as it still is, particularly noteworthy ; for, before we go any further, it may be interesting to note that the Cotswolds here throw out a spur from the main range, by way of Rodmarton into the on the plateau of the Cotswolds, in a district where the brashy limestone overlying the oolitic rock is near to the surface ; but, though it was in the vicinity of the parting of two great water systems, it enjoyed itself the advantage of but one intermittent stream. It was pulled down in the



THE CONSERVATORY CORRIDOR.



THE NORTH SIDE OF THE SALOON.

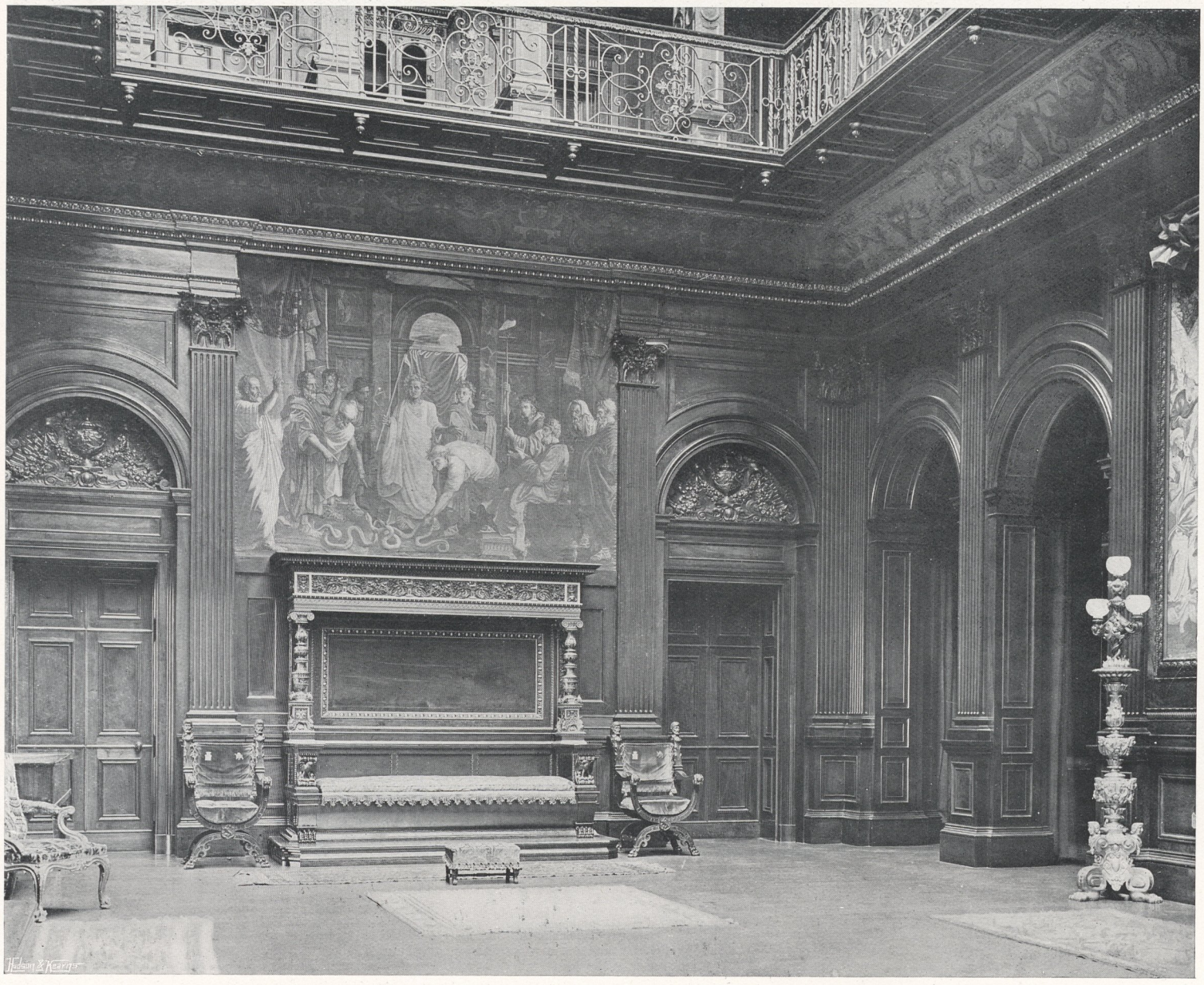


THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE SALOON.

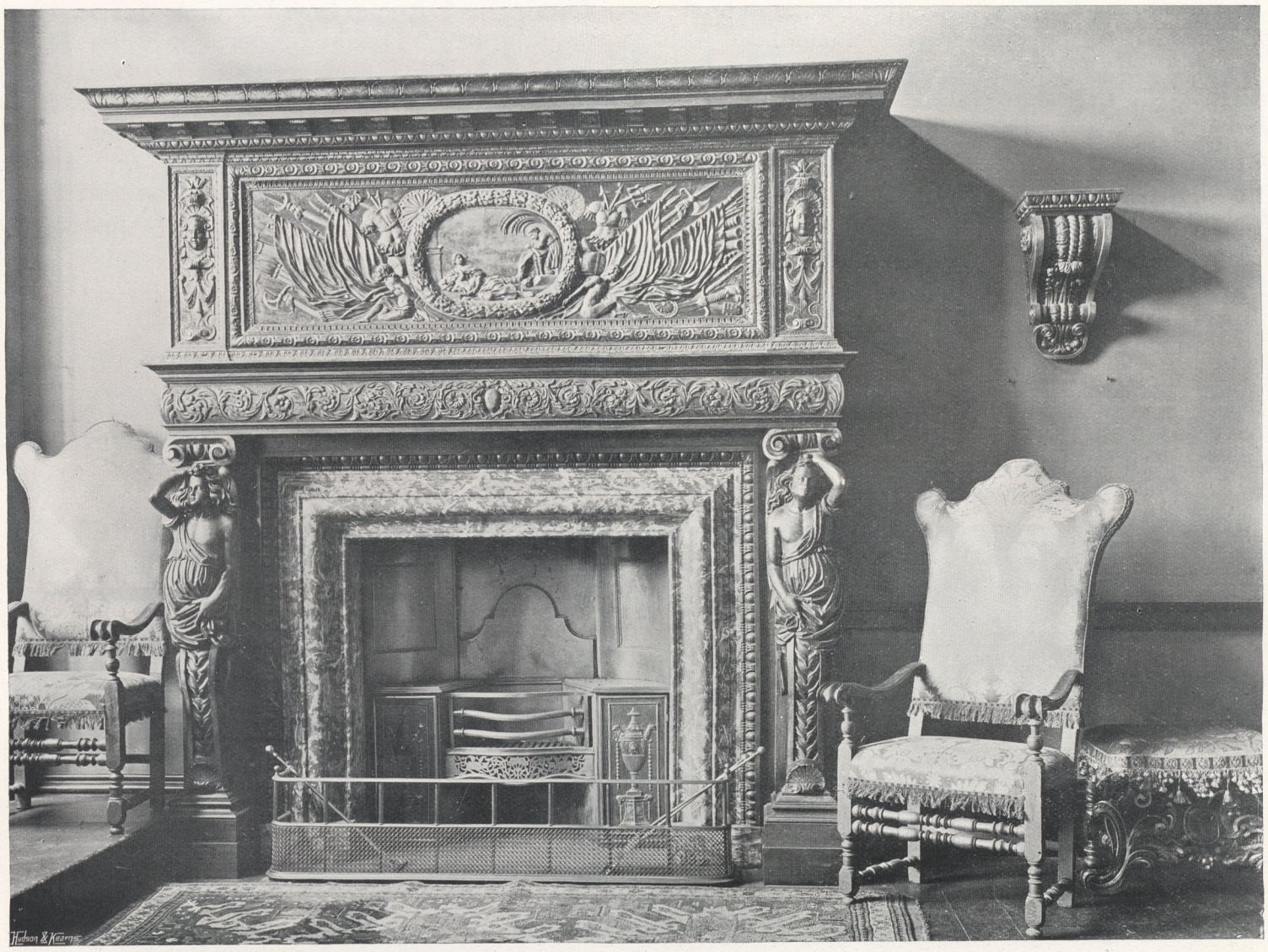
eighteenth century, and a second house took its place, which remained standing until 1863, when it was removed by the late Mr. Holford to make way for the present imposing structure. The building of the new house went on hand in hand with the improvement of the estate. Crooked ways were made straight, whereby the park took a better form, so that the house might be less intruded upon by the traffic of the high roads; and even the pleasant village of Westonbirt was "moved on" a little, so that the site of the village stocks is still pointed out in the garden, while the houses of the village are a little more apart. The pretty church, wherein are the monuments of the Holfords, stands in a grove in the garden not far from the house.

Mr. Holford's architect was Lewis Vulliamy, a pupil of Smirke, who was successful in the design of several important places, and from whose designs Mr. Holford's splendid Italian house in Park Lane was also built. Vulliamy, who had travelled much abroad as a student of the Royal Academy, had a profound knowledge of classic forms, but he had also imbibed the true spirit of the English Renaissance. Indeed, we may say that his equal acquaintance with the pure and mixed styles did much to give him the ability to conceive bold forms of grouping, and to adorn his structures with much attractive detail. Unfortunately he died in 1871, before Westonbirt was completed; nor are the architectural parts of the Italian garden from his designs. Vulliamy took his idea for Westonbirt principally from the famous house of Wollaton, Lord Middleton's place near Nottingham, which has also influenced the style of Mentmore, Thoresby and other great houses. Magnificent as is the character of Wollaton, it has been criticised as presenting somewhat of a stringing together of ornament, without solidity of design; but it will be seen that this defect—if defect there be—has been avoided at Westonbirt. Dignified simplicity is in the bold form of the edifice, and the central and angle towers, with their pilasters and adornments, are admirable in their effect. The wall spaces are sufficiently relieved, the grouping of masses is fine and the skyline very picturesque.

Colour is one of the great charms of Westonbirt, and the house shares in the effect. It is built of the local stone, which has a beautiful warm tone, and when the setting sun shines on the garden front, and lights up all the gorgeous gardenage, the effect is one that cannot escape the memory. Beyond the lake, in the landscape garden, this splendid picture is enhanced in charm by being reflected in the silver mirror of the water. How noble is the grouping of the structure will be seen to advantage in the picture



THE WEST END OF THE SALOON.



THE STUDIO CHIMNEY-PIECE.

of the east angle on the garden front; but wherever we look there is something to please and charm in the design.

Now let us notice the nobility of the interior, premising that through a fine ante-hall, adorned with splendid columns and pilasters of rare classic marbles, we reach the grand galleried saloon to which three pictures are devoted. The proportions are excellent and the adornments superb. Magnificent Gobelins tapestry, from designs by Nicholas Poussin, clothes the walls with rich and harmonious colour. The floor is of polished oak, the ceiling is rich and the great chimney-piece, of Dutch origin, in glorious marbles, with sculptured panels, twisted pillars, arches, bust and urns, is a marvel of craftsmanship and skill. The bronze figures standing in the place of fire-dogs are remarkably graceful and beautiful, and there is much other rich work in metal in the noble apartment. The furniture is mostly Italian, and includes some very interesting examples. There will be noticed at the end of the hall, standing between the two enriched doorways and fluted Corinthian pilasters, a canopied throne, which has a history. It was the custom of the Italian princes to have in their houses such thrones of honour to be used as the *sedia* of the Pope when he visited them; and this particular specimen was a present made by the Medici to the Strozzi on the occasion of a double wedding between the sons and daughters of the two houses. We might go on describing the beauties of the interior of Westonbirt, but we shall leave the pictures to tell much of the story. There are spacious drawing-rooms and libraries—for Captain Holford has a fine collection of valuable books — and the French boudoir is charming in its grace and gaiety. The style is a free treatment of the Corinthian, with archings in the walls, a sculptured and enriched cornice and a delightful painted ceiling taken from a water-colour design by one of the great Spanish artists. The dining-room, studio and other apartments are not less excellent, and a splendid stairway leads up from the grand corridor to spacious suites of rooms above.

Although Captain Holford's main collection of pictures is contained in the gallery at Dorchester House, Park Lane, many fine examples of the old masters are also to be seen at Westonbirt. Among the most important are a beautiful "Nativity" by Moretto, two Rembrandts, being portraits of himself and of the wife of Justus Lipsius—both of these pictures are from the Fesch collection; two striking portraits by Sustermans, a beautiful "Adoration of the Shepherds," by Bonifazio Veronese, "Diana and Actæon," by Paolo Veronese, one of the few small landscapes from the brush of Domenichino, "The Assumption," a girl's head, and a "Magdalene" by Murillo; two Claudes, formerly known as the Methuen Claudes, a beautiful portrait by Tintoretto, works by Joseph Vernet, Guardi and Gaspar Poussin, a magnificent "Holy Family" by the artist known as the Master of the

"Death of the Virgin," after the Dutch school; three pictures by Teniers, including the "Triumph of Venus," and the beautiful picture known as "Le Diamant de la Curiosité," by Nicholas Berchem; "The Pedlar," a lovely little picture by Frans Mieris, and some of those exquisitely-painted birds for which Hondecoeter was famous. English artists are represented at Westonbirt by a portrait of the Duke of Hamilton by William Dobson, others by Opie, Allan, Ramsay and Romney, and a three-quarter-length painting of a Viscount Castlereagh by Sir Thomas Lawrence, which was presented by Lord Castlereagh to the late Mr. Holford's father. There are two fac-similes of this picture, one in the Waterloo Gallery at Windsor, and the other at Londonderry House. With these brief and inadequate notes on the Westonbirt pictures we must conclude our account of the beauties of the house.



THE ANTE-LIBRARY.