

CHORLEY HALL, CHESHIRE

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CHORLEY HALL lies in the parish of Wilmslow, within the medieval lordship of Bolyn. Records of the estate on which the hall stands begin in the late thirteenth century; at an early date it attained a separate identity within the manorial lordship, but was not itself a manor. Despite changes of ownership the estate always remained within the jurisdiction of the Manor of Bolyn, which retained the possession of the vill or township of Chorley; this latterly formed a part of that half of the manor which passed into the possession of the De Trafford family in the fifteenth century.

It is because of its non-manorial status that the hall is of particular interest, for it thus falls within the tradition of the lesser domestic architecture of the country, providing direct evidence of the antecedents of the later 'yeoman' houses. For its class it is a remarkably early survival, retaining in very substantial measure its original form of early fourteenth-century date. In 1958 the hall became vacant, affording an opportunity for a comprehensive archaeological and architectural examination of the arrangement and structure, generously provided to the authors and facilitated by the interest and co-operation of the present owner, Mr. Harry Brooks of Wilmslow, prior to the proposed restoration and improvement of the building so that it might continue as a residence.

Compilations made by the Cheshire historians Ormerod and Earwaker¹ afford some account of the history of the estate, although there is little direct documentary evidence for the actual construction or subsequent modification and extension of the hall. In 1280, when the lordship of Bolyn was held by Edmund Fitton, a charter records the grant of certain of his possessions to Robert de Downes on his marriage to Margaret Fitton, sister to Edmund. The grant included:

"all the land with its appurtenances, which John de Davenport held of me in the vill of Chorlegh, and all the land which Robert de Scharshale held of me in Scharshale, and the rents which Henry de Chorlegh and Richard, Lord of Mottram, pay me, and all the lands and rents which Ellen, Lady of Falinbrom, and formerly the wife of Sir Richard Phiton, has granted me in the aforesaid Vill of Chorlegh after her decease."

¹ Ormerod, G. *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*, 2nd ed., 1882.
Earwaker, J. P., *East Cheshire*, 1887, Vol. 1.

This charter affords the earliest known reference to the de Chorley family, deriving its name from the township, but it does not make clear whether it was in fact the Chorley Hall estate for which Henry paid rent to the Fittons², and if so, opens the question as to when the family became owners rather than tenants. Henry was succeeded by his son, also named Henry; and further documents refer successively to Robert de Chorley, in the reign of Edward III, to William Chorley and, in the reign of Richard II, to John de Chorley, his wife Alice and their son Henry. It is at this point that ownership is clearly established, for a charter of 1409 records that the latter Henry gave:

“to William de Honford and John Crowthecotes, chaplain, all my messuages, lands, tenements, rents and services which have descended to me by hereditary right on the death of John de Chorley, my father, and Alice my mother, in the vill of Chorley and in Holyneworth . . .”

By a further deed of 1420, the John Crowthecotes mentioned above remitted to William de Honford his share of the bequest, including:

“all my rights and claims which I have in all those messuages, lands, tenements, rents and services, with all that appertains to them, which I lately have received of the gift and feoffment of Henry de Chorley, in the County of Chester.”

William de Honford who now came into full possession of the estate was a younger brother of Sir John de Honford (now Handforth) and the husband of Matilda, widow of Robert de Legh of Adlington. William died about 1452, and was succeeded by Robert Honford, who in 1486 made over his estates to his son, also named Robert. The latter's heiress was his only daughter, Anne, who before 1495 married John Stanley. On his death without an heir, Anne married, before 1523, Thomas Davenport.

In this way Chorley Hall passed to the Davenports, remaining with the family for five generations. Thomas was succeeded by his son, Robert, who died before 1557, when the estate passed to a grandson of Thomas, William Davenport of Chorley. William had married Grace, daughter of a Chester alderman, and after his death in 1569, his widow married John Grange, who is recorded as living at Chorley Hall; both were buried at Wilmslow in 1613. They were succeeded by Henry Davenport, presumably the son of William and Grace, and a question arises whether he himself resided at Chorley, for an entry in the registers of Wilmslow parish church records the baptism of one John Pott,

² This assumption is made by William Norbury, (*Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 1886, p. 101). Earwaker quotes a further charter, dated 1348, whereby Robert de Downes and Margaret grant all their lands in Chorley to their daughter Matilda de Downes.

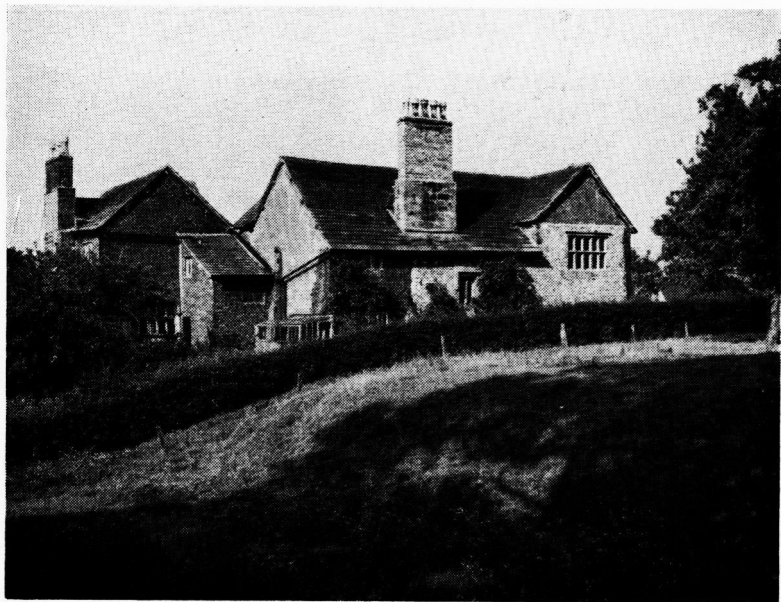


FIG. 1. The North Front.



FIG. 2. The Hall from the South.
CHORLEY HALL, CHESHIRE.

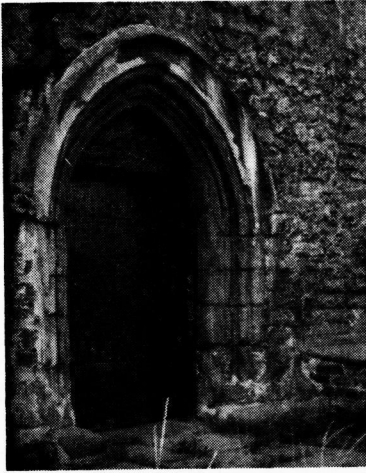


FIG. 3. North Doorway.

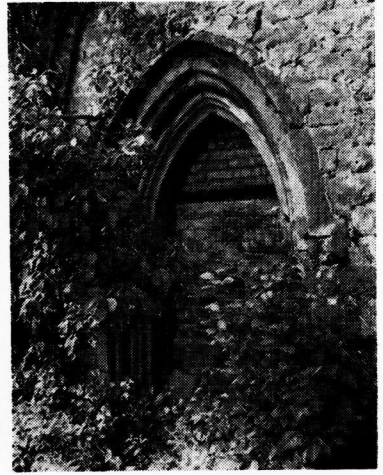


FIG. 4. South Doorway.

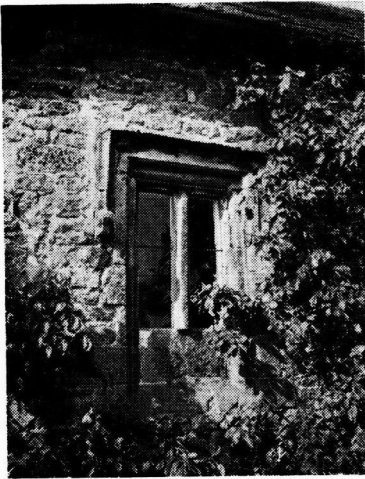


FIG. 5. Hall window on South Front.

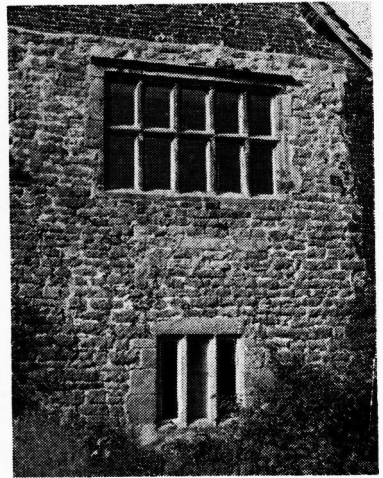


FIG. 6. The South Wall of the solar block showing original window to buttery.

“sonne of Mr. John Pott, dwelling at Chorley Hall”. The hall may have been leased to the latter, or there may have been two (related?) families living there, for by this time the hall comprised two separate buildings. There are other hints in later records that the hall was occupied as a dual residence. Whatever the explanation, the William Davenport who succeeded his father, Henry, lived at the hall for some years. In 1633 a deed records the sale of the estate, incorrectly described as the manor of Chorley, and the property passed from the Davenports.

It was purchased by Francis Downes, resold soon afterwards to John Hobson and then acquired by Sir Thomas Stanley, mentioned as holding the Hall in the Churchwardens' accounts of Alderley Church of 1640. It was about this time, according to inquisition records, that Sir Thomas undertook the enlargement of his residence at Alderley (now destroyed), erecting in front of it a stone-arched gateway; and it seems that he also undertook improvements at Chorley Hall, for the architectural evidence there points strongly to an important renovation having occurred at a similar date. Sir Thomas was a staunch Puritan and supporter of the Parliamentary cause; so also was Sir George Booth, reputed to have entertained Cromwell while resident, presumably as a tenant, at Chorley Hall. Later, the Stanleys themselves appear as residents at the Hall, and they so remained at least until 1773, in the time of Sir James Stanley. It continued to be their family property until 1938, but in more recent years was leased to tenant farmers, a Mr. Davis occupying the house from 1901.

Turning now to the architectural evidence; three major stages in the structural history of the house can be discerned, followed only by minor repairs and alterations of more recent times.

1. *c.* 1330. The original build, comprising a ground-floor hall with a two-storey solar wing at the lower end, and detached kitchen, all contained in a moated enclosure.
2. *c.* 1560. A major reconstruction, in which the height of the hall was subdivided to form an upper floor, a part of its roof being raised for this purpose. A wall fireplace was introduced in place of the former central hearth, and a stair made adjacent to the breast. In addition, an entirely new two-storey block was built in timber, projecting approximately at right angles from one corner of the upper end of the old block, and slightly detached from it.
3. *c.* 1640. A lesser reconstruction, when the first floor over the hall was made more convenient by raising a further portion of its roof, and many of the old windows were drastically remodelled and enlarged.

- Two more recent phases can be added to these three principal stages.
4. Early nineteenth century. A brick staircase block was built to connect the original and sixteenth century half-timbered blocks on both ground and first floors. Numerous rough wall repairs in brick were also carried out.
 5. 1915. Delapidation repairs and some internal modifications, principally to the sixteenth century half-timbered wing.
- These stages will now be traced in detail.

Fourteenth century. In its original form the house comprised a single-storey hall, lying approximately east and west, with a two-storey wing, comprising solar over service rooms, rising to a higher level at the east end of the hall and roofed at right angles to it, the whole forming a simple rectangle on plan. Despite subsequent improvements and repairs, the form of these original elements can be readily deciphered. The hall, measuring 34 feet 4 inches by 24 feet 9 inches wide internally, is of two approximately equal bays. The eastern bay is subdivided unequally by a spere truss, a characteristic feature of the medieval halls of Cheshire, and of the Highland North-West of England.³ This additional frame defines the through entrance passage, which is entered from each elevation by a fine doorway with two-centered arched head, having splayed and moulded reveals and a drip-mould with simple stops. Three doorways, also with fine arched heads and moulded jambs, open from the screens passage to the ground floor of the adjoining two-storey wing, comprising pantry, buttery and a central through-passage to a former kitchen, which must have been a detached structure, possibly of timber, of which no trace survives. A smaller opening from the screens passage, with similarly-arched head, forms a buttery hatch. The east wall of the service block was rebuilt in brickwork in the early 19th century, no doubt because of the poor quality of the early stonework and because of foundation weaknesses such as have given repeated trouble elsewhere. A blocked doorway in the centre of this brick wall indicates that the kitchen passage still continued to deliver to the open, for if at any time there has been a kitchen adjoined to the east end wall, it has left no obvious trace.

³ In *Monmouthshire Houses* (Sir Cyril Fox and Lord Raglan, 1951, Vol. 1, p. 87), the point is made that in the south-eastern Lowland zone of Britain, the screens passage is contained within the hall structure, whilst in the Highland North-West it is usually beyond the end of the hall. The spere-truss provides a physical termination to the hall itself, the entrance-passage forming an additional half bay beyond this, and thereby accords with the Highland type, which becomes more apparent in later yeoman dwellings. Fox and Raglan suggest that the spere-truss reflects the aisled tradition of hall building, and as such first appears in the English lowlands, but was not there maintained, becoming instead a feature of ground floor-halls in the Highland zone.

(A kitchen would scarcely be necessary in this class of house, once a wall-fireplace had been built in the hall.)

Of the former fenestration, only two windows now remain. One original three-light window with flat head and concave-moulded mullions still survives on the south elevation, lighting the buttery. On the same front is to be seen the second of the original windows, once serving the hall and now partially obscured by the later chimney-breast and lighting the sixteenth-century stair. The window is of two lights with square head, having a moulded label with dropped ends terminating in rectangular stops. The former mullion and the tracery of the head have been replaced by a heavier central mullion, and the lower part of the opening has been blocked to allow for the rise of the stair. Internally the embrasure is square-headed, with splayed jambs.

The solar over the service rooms is a fine apartment now measuring 17 feet⁴ by 24 feet 9 inches internally, spanned by a central truss. Both of the solar gables originally were timber-framed, that on the north front surviving intact, although concealed externally by later plaster, but the south gable has been replaced by early nineteenth-century brickwork. The timbering of the north gable comprises heavy, close-spaced vertical studs with a squat king-stud rising from a collar. The existing windows to the solar date from the seventeenth century, and the existing doorway, at the head of the stair, was presumably introduced at the same time as the sixteenth-century stair. There is no evidence of an original stair within the solar block, and no position suggests itself, for it is improbable that a stair would have been contrived in either of the service rooms. It is possible that the original access to the solar was by an external stairway, perhaps on the north front, as the centrally-placed buttery window surviving on the south elevation renders the placing of a stair here less likely. The first floor construction is unusual, with heavy joists, 6 inches wide, spanning the cross walls, and solidly infilled between the joists with a form of cement, probably gypsum, over which the random-width oak boards are nailed. The present fireplace is of a piece with the rebuilt brick east wall, and there is no indication of an original hearth.

The walls of the house are built in rubble stonework, on a moulded plinth, the wall thickness averaging 2 feet 8 inches, the west gable and the cross wall being rather lighter at 2 feet 4 inches. The stone is a local gritstone, the dressed stone of the openings being in a coarsely figured

⁴ The dimension originally would be approximately 16 feet, as the east wall, formerly 2 feet 4 inches thick, has been rebuilt in 14 inch brickwork. Common dimensions for thirteenth or early fourteenth century solar blocks were 24 feet by 16 feet, with which this almost precisely corresponds.



NORTH ELEVATION



SOUTH ELEVATION

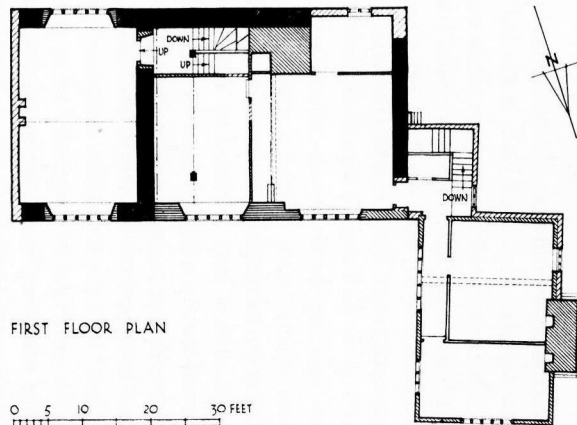
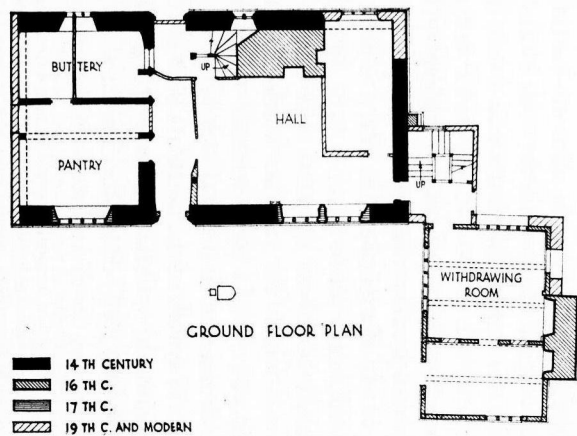
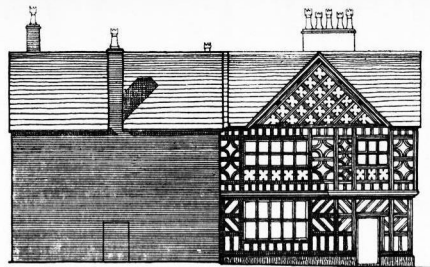


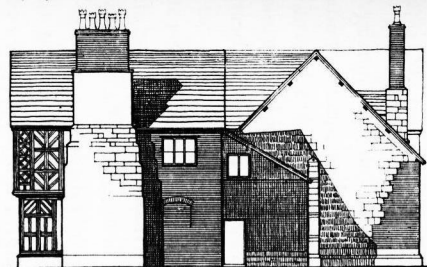
FIG. 7. Chorley Hall, Cheshire.



EAST ELEVATION



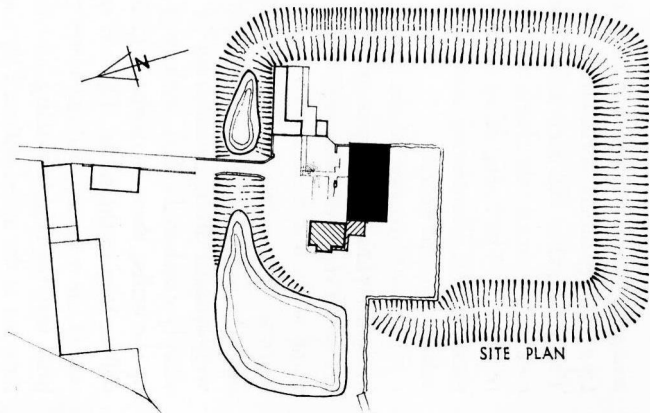
SECTION THROUGH HALL
LOOKING EAST



WEST ELEVATION



SECTION LOOKING NORTH



SITE PLAN

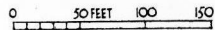
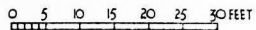


FIG. 8. Chorley Hall Cheshire.

material which is known locally as "robin's claw" or "crow's feet", from the granular configuration which is revealed on weathering.⁵ The west gable has been refaced in coursed ashlar, but there is quite conclusive proof that there was never any original extension beyond this point. The roofs, of 45 degree pitch, are covered with local stone slates, laid in diminishing courses from ridge to eaves; these have been relaid in recent years.

The roof structure of the building is finely preserved and is of great interest. It has been suggested⁶ that the timber structure revealed within the house represents an original timber-framed house, later enclosed by stone walls, but there is absolutely no evidence to support such a contention. Three fine oak trusses survive over the hall, each being of different form. The central open truss has straight, uniform blades of well-squared timber, measuring 13 inches by 7 inches, connected by a sharply-cambered collar, with large arched braces rising from half-way up the walls; these no doubt originally sprang from corbels, such as can still be seen in the solar. There is not the slightest trace of a wall post within the masonry, and the heavy 7-inch wide arched braces are simply built into the rubble walling. As in all the open trusses, the blades are tenoned at the apex, stiffened by a triangular block within the angle of the blades, and the 7 inches by 3 inches ridge is set squarely in a seating cut in the tops of the blades.

The spere truss is very similar in form, with the addition of the massive spere posts, averaging 13 inches by 10 inches, and widening at the junction with the blades; the posts here receive the arched braces, that on the south side having been cut away when the sixteenth-century stair was formed. There is nothing to show that there were any timber transverse members between the spere posts and the walls, but one assumes that these spaces were infilled to form solid spurs or "speres" to reduce draughts from the entrances. In later halls of the region, including Rufford, such speres were supplemented by a massive removable screen, standing centrally between them but leaving passage room on either side.

Against the lower end of the hall, set against the stone wall separating the hall and solar blocks, is a third truss of less pretentious character,

⁵ This unusual stone occurs at the top of neighbouring Alderley Edge, and also at Bidston in the Wirral.

⁶ William Norbury (*cf.*) makes this suggestion largely on the evidence of the internal timber-framed partitions. Apart from the fact that these are all later than the stone walling, it is not unusual in this region to find masonry structures in which internal walls are of timber-framing, suggesting the persistence of an earlier tradition of construction.

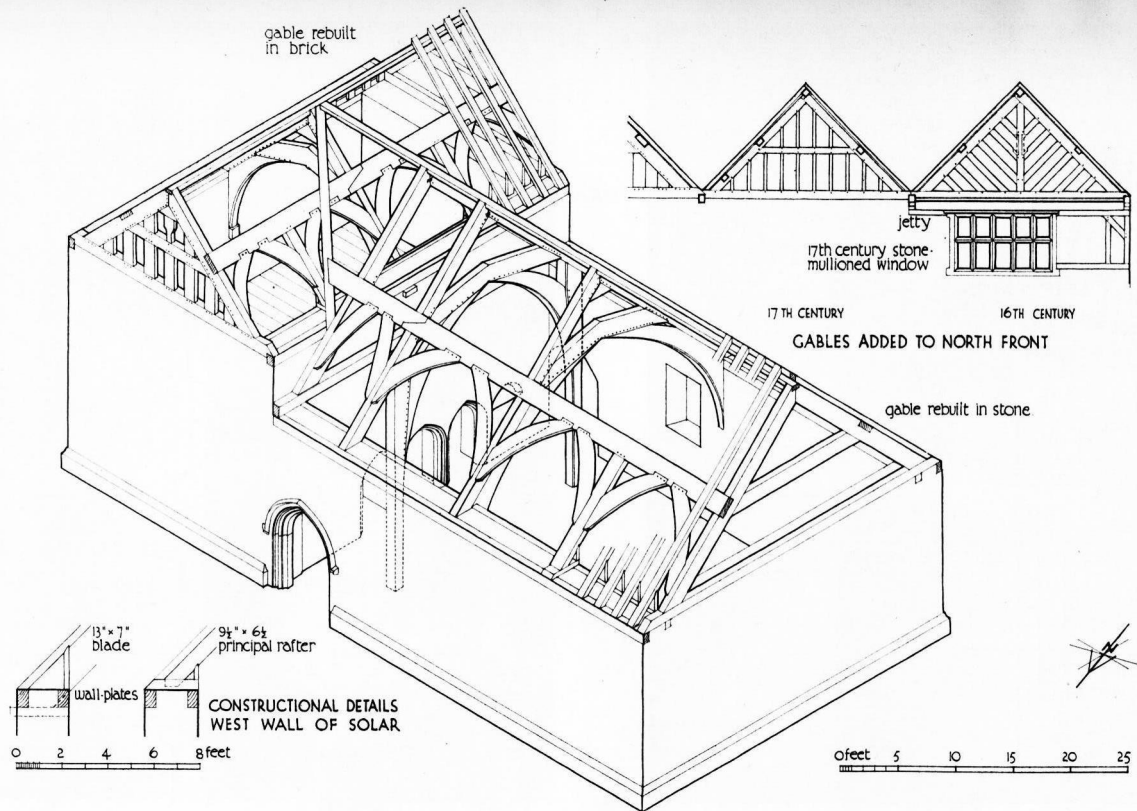
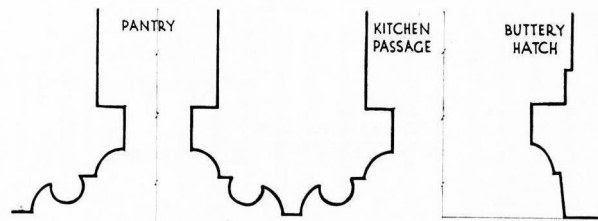
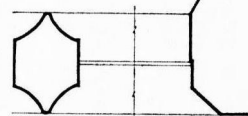
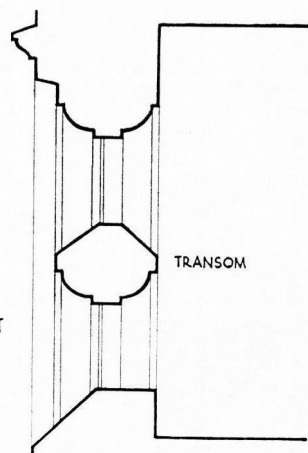
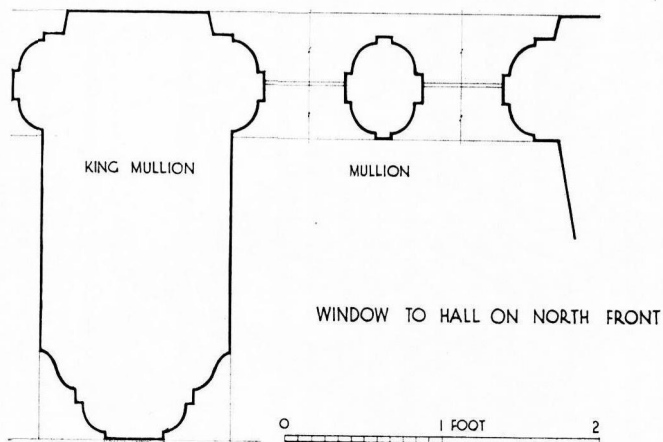
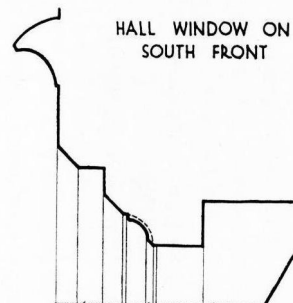
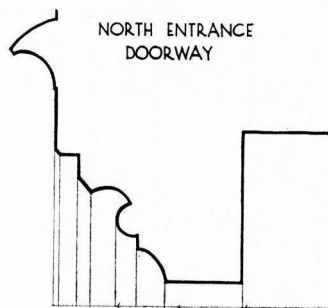


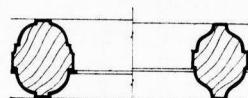
FIG. 9. Structural Evolution of Chorley Hall.



OPENINGS TO SERVICE ROOMS FROM
SCREENS PASSAGE



WINDOW IN SOUTH WALL OF
BUTTERY



WITHDRAWING ROOM
SOUTH FRONT

GROUND FLOOR
NORTH FRONT

WINDOW MULLIONS IN
TIMBER-FRAMED BLOCK

FIG. 10. Chorley Hall. Detail of mouldings.

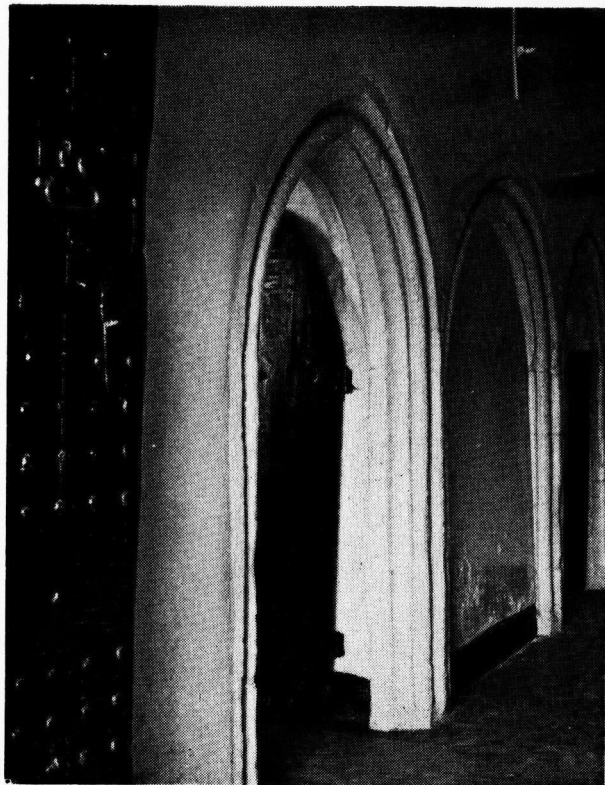


FIG. 11. Service room doorways from entrance passage.



FIG. 12. The landing of the sixteenth-century stair showing spere post.

with a flat, uncambered tie-beam at eaves level, and a flat collar above, both these members being grooved and doubtless intended to receive an infilling of wattle and daub—or “raddlins and daub” as it is called by Earwaker. There is no sign of subsidiary framing however, and the wattle panels must have been of large size. (In the later, sixteenth-century, partitions on the first floor, similarly large panels of wattle and daub still survive.) All these trusses are numbered in Roman numerals on the west side of the apex, the centre truss being numbered II, the spere-truss III, and the closed truss at the lower end of the hall IIII. It is almost certain that the west gable of the hall was originally timber-framed, corresponding to the gables of the solar, and this end frame would presumably have been numbered I. As previously noted, this gable has been refaced in ashlar to the apex, but the original blades can be detected within the thickness of the wall, together with the wind-brace which springs from the northern blade.

A single purlin, measuring 19 inches by 6 inches, is housed into the back of each blade, being scarf-jointed above the spere truss. Flat, curved wind braces, averaging 16 inches by $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, are tenoned to the blades and housed into the backs of the purlins. The western bay, between truss II and the gable, is subdivided unequally by a minor principal rafter measuring $13\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 6 inches, rising only from eaves level to the lower side of the purlin to which it is tenoned, and this provides an interim support for the wind-bracing.

Subsequent repairs and alterations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the more recent restoration of 1915, have resulted in considerable alterations to the original roof structure, the south side having been largely renewed, involving an extra purlin and the replacement of many of the rafters, which originally were of heavy section, 7 inches by 3 inches, laid flat. The provision of the chimney-stack on the south side, and of the two gables successively raised on the north front, have resulted in the removal of all but two of the wind-braces, and although the trusses themselves are largely unaltered, the method of seating the blades within the walls has been completely obscured. The hall was originally heated from an open hearth in the centre of the floor, while the solar might have been served by a free-standing brazier. There is, however, no strong indication of soot or smoke-blackening on any of the timbers, nor is there any evidence of a louvre. The ridge over the western bay of the hall was renewed in the sixteenth century and this alteration would have eradicated any traces of such an opening; the ridge of the solar similarly has been replaced.

The solar roof has undergone extensive repair, the east side having



FIG. 13. The central truss, showing later cambered beam supporting ceiling.



FIG. 14. The subsidiary principal rafter.
DETAILS OF WEST SIDE OF SOLAR ROOF, CHORLEY HALL.

been largely renewed at the time of the rebuilding in brick of the end wall. The north gable, the central truss and the whole of the west side of the roof remain largely unchanged, and this side of the structure, rising from the heavy stone wall between hall and solar, provides the most important evidence of the original methods of construction for the entire roof. The central truss is similar to the central truss of the hall, with cambered collar and arched braces, of which only one survives entirely, springing from a corbel built into the west wall, the form of which is obscured by subsequent plastering. There is a simple rounded boss at the centre of the soffit of the collar. The apex of the blades is formed similarly to those of the hall trusses, with square-set ridge, replaced later by a diagonally-set beam, and again there was a single purlin each side, with curved wind-braces. As in the case over the hall, a subsidiary principal rafter from eaves to purlin subdivides the bay on each side of the truss, and receives the feet of the wind-braces.

Against the west wall of the solar it is possible to determine the original seating of the blades, of the secondary principal rafters and of the common rafters, in relation to the wall-plate, indicating the construction of the entire roof. Two wall-plates are provided on the wall top, each approximately 9 inches by 6 inches, placed on either face of the wall. The plates are tied together at the gables by the tie-beams, which are notched over them, and at the feet of the central truss blades and of the two subsidiary principal rafters. In the latter case, a timber member measuring 10 inches by 5 inches lies across the plates, possibly notched over them, and the principal rafter is tenoned to this member. (Fig. 9). The blade of the truss appears to rise from a heavier cross member, measuring 13 inches by 4 inches, placed in the wall immediately under the wall-plate, and projecting through the wall on the side of the hall. Common rafters appear originally to have rested on the outer wall-plate, and it is likely that small sprocket pieces on their backs carried the projection of the eaves on the outer walls. From the inner wall-plate, vertical members, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick by approximately 6 inches wide, rise to the soffit of the rafters, into which they are roughly housed.

All roof timbers are well shaped and finished, the collar and arched braces being chamfered, and all members are joined by well-cut mortice-and-tenon joints with closely-spaced pegs. The original pegs are easily recognisable from later insertions of the sixteenth century, which are of heavier, square section.

The medieval house described above stands in a level area enclosed by a broad moat, now largely dry, with a more recent stone bridge replacing the original structure. The building provides an unusually

fine illustration of the early medieval house-plan. The T-shaped plan,⁷ in which the solar is in the form of a first-floor private hall over service rooms, at right angles to the large ground-floor common hall, represents an early stage in the evolution of the full medieval H-plan, fusing together the first-floor and ground-floor hall traditions. Subsequent development of the medieval plan in England relegated the lower end unit to a subordinate role and placed the solar wing as a duplicate at the upper end of the hall, over a ground-floor chamber or cellar, to form the characteristic manorial plan of the fourteenth century and later, with a central hall flanked by two-storey wings under a common roof. A looser relationship of the first-floor hall, representing Norman tradition, with the native ground-floor hall, occurs in castle building from the twelfth century, but takes more coherent form in the manor houses of the thirteenth century. Non-manorial halls are less important buildings, having a wholly domestic function, and naturally therefore were in general later in evolving. The T-shaped plan represented by Chorley remained common in Suffolk (and doubtless elsewhere) until the early sixteenth century, but, as one would expect, the persons who caused them to be built were of progressively less high standing in the social scale, for their betters meantime had followed the newer fashions.

Earwaker, briefly alluding to the medieval plan of Chorley, suggested that the original hall was built by William de Honford after 1420, and subsequent writers have repeated this surmise without question. The evidence of plan and architectural detail, however, conclusively points to a date not later than mid-fourteenth century. Indeed it can be said that the surviving hall was the residence of the de Chorley family from c. 1330, the likely builder being Robert de Chorley. Houses of this date and character are indeed few, and Chorley Hall is a particularly complete example.⁸

It is not possible to relate the documentary history with the original building of the hall more accurately than this. Subsequent changes in the ownership of the estate, however, are of more value in indicating the circumstances which gave rise to the progressive alteration of the structure.

Sixteenth century. Shortly before 1523, the estate passed into the hands of the Davenports, an important Cheshire family. The first major alterations to the hall, including the erection of the half-timbered wing,

⁷ Described by the roof arrangement, although the solar wing does not actually project beyond the rectangle circumscribing the entire house.

⁸ An interesting parallel is provided in the Leadenporch House, Deddington, Oxon, described in an earlier volume of these Transactions, Vol. 4, 1956, p. 143.

clearly date from the sixteenth century. Comparison of the character of the timber framing with that of similar structures in this region suggests a date for this wing soon after 1550, and it is probable that this major alteration was made by grandson William Davenport of Chorley and wife Grace, who dwelt in the hall from before 1557 to 1569.

The vital amendment was the introduction of a wall fireplace, positioned centrally against the south long wall of the hall, this then permitting the insertion of a chamber floor in the height of the hall. Timber-stud partitions were built across the line of the speres and also on either side of the massive fireplace (which projects 6 feet 9 inches into the room), shutting off two large recesses behind the line of the face of the breast. The recess on the west of the stack provided a small parlour, and the other accommodated a new staircase. The form of the parlour at this time is assumed from evidence at the chamber floor-level above; the stair and its screening partition survive intact. The hall thus became a neat, draughtless, rectangular apartment, 28 feet 6 inches long by 18 feet wide, with three doors: the entrance door, centrally placed in the screens passage partition, one door to the tiny parlour and another, close to the chimney breast, leading to the stair. The staircase is also accessible from the screens passage.

The inserted chamber floor is supported by beams corresponding with the added timber-stud walls and by a transverse beam spanning from the north wall to the chimney breast. The floor is not level; it is 9 inches lower over the parlour recess and over the eastern part of the hall than it is over the upper end of the hall. This irregularity is due to manoeuvres for head-room in the chambers. These changes in level may originally have been reflected in the soffit of the hall ceiling, which has subsequently been re-ceiled below the level of all beams in an irregular incline. Two main chambers were formed, divided by a stud partition with large panels which still survives, although the communicating doorway has been altered from the original position. The chamber over the lower end of the hall extends across the screens passage. A third, small, chamber to the west of the chimney breast has its floor at the lower level, as above mentioned, so that one steps down 10 inches into it. There were fireplaces, it seems, both to the hall and parlour below and to the large and the small first-floor western chambers; these account for the prodigious size of the stack, although the extent of its projection into the hall may in fact have been due to an attempt to avoid removal of the open-truss arch brace, across which the stack lies. Above the roof the stack is a rectangular mass of ashlar stonework, crowned by five modern pots, at least one of which must

be a dummy. The form of none of the fireplaces can now be seen, the ground floor openings having modern grates, and the breasts being plastered over comprehensively.

The stair is of particular interest. It has baulk-timber steps of triangular section, supported on heavy bearers, the winders being constructed with $2\frac{1}{2}$ inch treads and risers, pegged together. Light for the stair is secured from the fourteenth-century window described earlier, this lying partly behind the chimney stack, of which the rear corner has been cut away to allow the window to function adequately. The stair returns upon itself around the southern spere-truss post, at an upper half landing, from which a doorway was cut at this time into the solar,⁹ so obviating the need for retaining the presumed external stair. The short upper flight of the stairs, still of solid baulks, leads to a doorway, now blocked, near the chimney breast, entering the lower (eastern) of the two main chambers: thus the three chambers would have to be reached in series, one from the other. Alongside the upper stair flight is a panel of finely-profiled wooden balusters; these seem to represent an early seventeenth century improvement, belonging to the next stage of alterations.

The height of the fourteenth-century hall was a little too low to allow sufficiently comfortable headroom for an inserted first floor; hence the manipulation of floor levels. The main improvement in this connection was actually to raise a portion of the roof, the part selected being that over the northern half of the upper bay, that is, the bay formed between the hall open truss and the western end gable. Here, a spur transverse roof was constructed, standing on timber-framed cheeks on the west and east sides and a corresponding apron on the north front; this carried a window, above which was made a jettied half-timbered gable, formed with a king-strut and diagonally-inclined studs. The ridge-piece of this spur roof is set diagonally, and as a part of the reconstruction, the old ridge between the open truss and west gable wall was renewed and re-set in the diagonal disposition. Other consequences were the removal of the minor principal rafter on the northern side of this bay—although not the purlin which received it—and the wind-braces connected with it. The chamber thus improved was the only one of the three to receive natural light; the small room

⁹ It is not altogether certain whether the doorway was introduced at this date, or whether for a time at least the solar retained its separate external approach. The doorway has a square head, with heavy timber frame, and corresponds with the heavy square-headed frame introduced into the main entrance doorway on the north front, which retains a massive studded plank door. On balance it is likely that these both represent late sixteenth century work rather than that of the seventeenth century improvements, when timber-work of much lighter character was introduced into the building.



FIG. 15. Original North gable of solar.

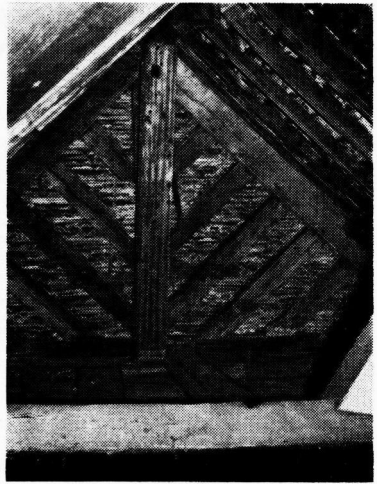


FIG. 16. Sixteenth-century gable on North Front.

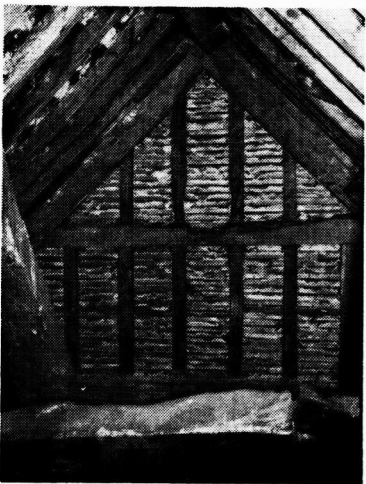


FIG. 17. Seventeenth-century gable on North Front.

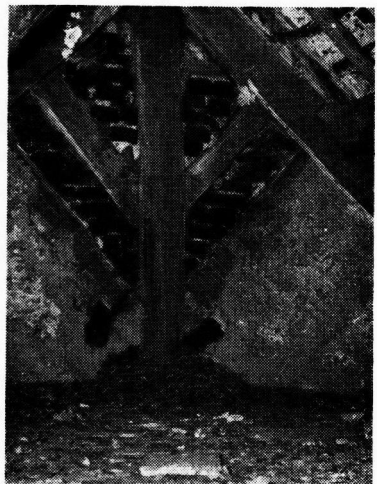


FIG. 18. South gable of timber-framed block.

DETAILS OF GABLES, CHORLEY HALL.



FIG. 19. The sixteenth-century stair.

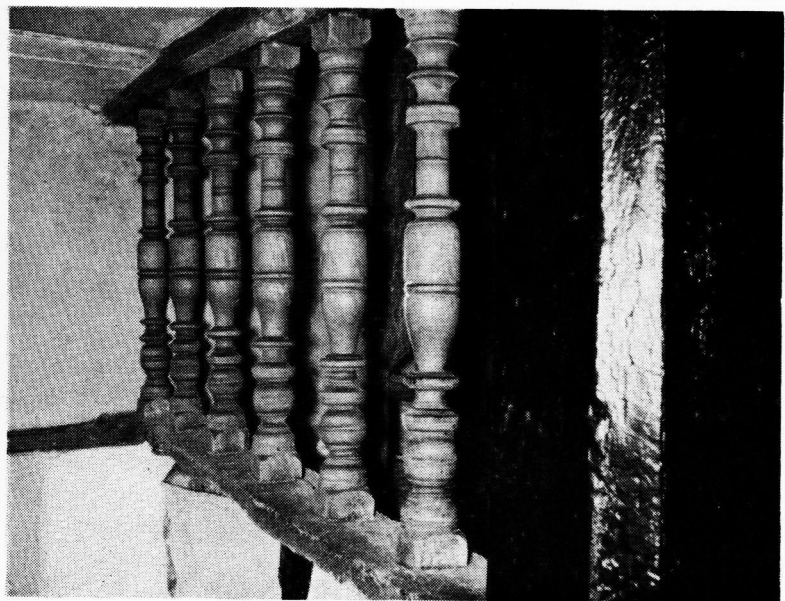


FIG. 20. Balustrade to upper landing.
STAIR DETAILS, CHORLEY HALL.

and that over the eastern half of the hall were unlit, and the lower angle of the roof on the north side of the latter was shut off by ashlaring, as housings on the purlin indicate. Due to the ashlaring, the wind-braces hereabouts survived until the alterations of the following century which removed all but one adjacent to the central truss and one in the north-west corner of the hall.

The framing of the new gable at the west end of the north front corresponds closely to that of the south gable of the half-timbered block, and it is clear that these two stages of building occurred within a short space of time after *c.* 1560. The new block provided greatly improved accommodation on both of its two floors, the principal ground floor apartment being a withdrawing room with two chambers above, fireplaces being provided in all four apartments.¹⁰ The block was originally free-standing, clear of the north-west angle of the hall, and not quite at right angles to the older structure, being jettied on all four faces. The timber framing stands on a sandstone plinth, and the gables on the entrance front are richly decorated with diaper patterning of a form found in several other halls of the region.¹¹ A massive ashlar stone stack projects from the west wall, and corresponds in character to the hall stack. This building was extensively restored in 1915, when much of the original timbering was replaced, but apparently on the original pattern, as indicated by earlier photographs. It is almost certain that the doorway on the east wall, opening from the entrance courtyard, is in its original position, and the stair, now removed, may originally have risen in the corner either to the right or left of this entrance. The ground floor window on the north front, renewed and enlarged in 1915, is off-centre, possibly to allow for this stair. On the south front there is a second doorway to the timber block, and near it, a doorway giving access to the west end of the old hall; but despite the logic (in the modern view) of such a communication between the two buildings, it does not seem likely that either doorway was made at this time. If the new block had been intended as a deliberate extension of the old house, it would not have been difficult to make it so. There is a unity about each of the two blocks as they stood at this period which makes them appear as separate, if related, concepts.

All the windows in the timber block, except one on the ground floor south front, are modern replacements of 1915, but in the repairs

¹⁰ Photographs taken before 1915 show three chimney pots on the stack to this wing. In 1915 they were increased to five, of which one is a dummy.

¹¹ One of these, Handford Hall, near Cheadle, slightly more mature in character, is dated 1562.

of that date a significant distinction has been preserved. The oak mullions of the first floor windows are of ogee section, thus representing the original sixteenth-century build, while those of the windows on the ground floor, including the one surviving intact, have the ovolo section, and thus record seventeenth century improvements or repairs.

Seventeenth century. Shortly before 1640, the estate passed into the hands of the Stanleys of Alderley, after a period when the hall in part or whole appears to have been occupied by tenants (John Pott) and during which it changed hands three times in less than seven years. Partly due to these vicissitudes and partly to age, it is likely that the building was in some disrepair at this time, and it seems certain from the architectural evidence that Thomas Stanley set about the modernization and improvement of the structure at the same time that he is known to have been improving his house at Alderley. The principal alterations improved the first floor over the hall by raising the remainder of the north wall in stone, enframing a new window, and introducing a third, central, gable, lightly constructed of slender and roughly-shaped vertical studding. (Comparison of the three gables on this front, of fourteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth century dates, affords an interesting contrast in timber structure, the earliest being the most solidly and finely constructed.) New windows were substituted for the old or freshly introduced to all chambers elsewhere on this front, the new ones having stone mullions and transomes of heavy ovolo section and moulded labels, while a window of similar character was also substituted for that on the south wall of the old solar. The complete refacing of the west gable of the hall in stone may date from this period. This wall has clearly suffered severely from the effects of foundational weakness, which has involved repeated rebuilding. It is possible that the gable was infilled in stone, and the buttress added in the sixteenth century, and that *c.* 1640 the wall was refaced in ashlar, for the buttress is not bonded to or coursed with the walling.

Internally, the two building blocks were extensively improved. Large ovolo-mullioned windows were introduced in place of the earlier ogee type in the withdrawing room of the timber block, together with oak panelling and a carved overmantel.¹² In their present form the stone fireplaces in this wing seem to date only from 1915. In the earlier block, the original solar was provided with a cambered ceiling, below the collar of the truss, supported from a cambered beam

¹² The asymmetrical placing of the new window in the south wall suggests that the adjacent door may have been made at this time.

which spans the chamber almost on the line of the truss, and which in turn supports a spine beam. Joists of light section span from this spine beam and are housed into the original inner wall-plate. The stair was improved by the addition of a wooden balustrade to the upper landing, with widely-spaced turned balusters, mentioned earlier, whilst new framed doors were made for almost every internal position. The present stone bridge over the moat too, probably dates from this period, as well as the range of timber-framed farm buildings outside the moated enclosure on the north.

Nineteenth century and later. Subsequent building work at the hall mainly has been concerned with repairs to the wall structure, carried out in narrow Cheshire bricks, probably at the end of the eighteenth or early in the nineteenth century. The only really important improvement to the accommodation also belongs to this period, the joining together of the timber-framed block with the original hall by a brick-walled link building, with lean-to roof, containing a triple-flight stair, giving easy access to the majority of first-floor rooms. The new stair served the three chambers over the hall, for the doorway at the head of the sixteenth-century stair was now closed off, so that the old stair henceforward served the original solar only, with no communication at this level with the rest of the house. Evidently, the former solar had descended to the status of servants' bedroom. The period everywhere is denoted by the use of brick. The little parlour by the side of the hall fireplace was extended by a brick partition to make a much larger room, cutting off a substantial portion of the upper end of the hall, while the hall itself became a much more menial apartment, provided then or later with a wash-boiler flue on the north wall. The east wall of the old block was rebuilt in entirety in brickwork, the brickwork being carried around the neighbouring quoins. Similarly the south gable of the solar was rebuilt in brick, and the east side of the solar roof repaired. Brick was used again for yet another repair to the south-west corner of the hall wall, which had given continuous trouble, and the south wall of the timber block, together with its west wall as far as the chimney stack, cased in brickwork. Most of these were rough and unsightly repairs.

A photograph in Earwaker's *History of East Cheshire*, published in 1877, shows the hall looking much as it does today. The rubble walling of the north front shows as plastered over—traces of plaster still remain—and there is no break between the stone wall surface and the faces of the two more easterly gables on this front. The moulded timber

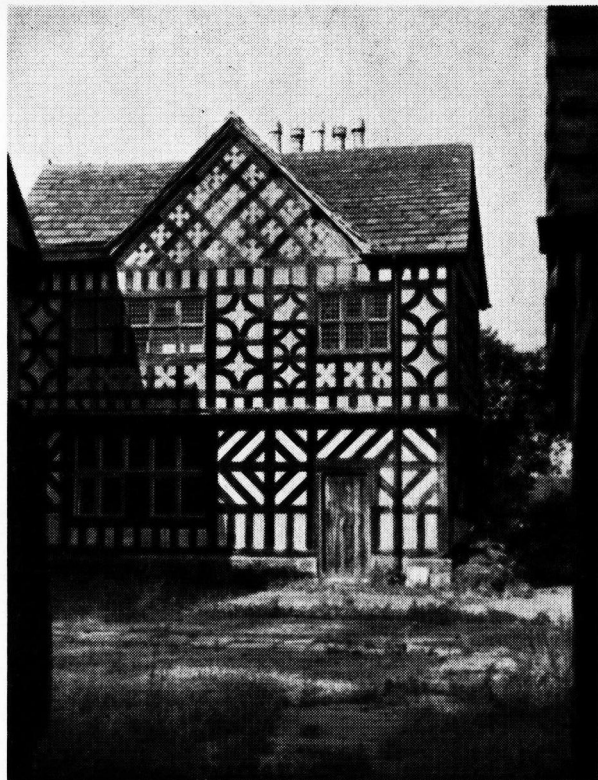


FIG. 21. The half-timbered block from the East.

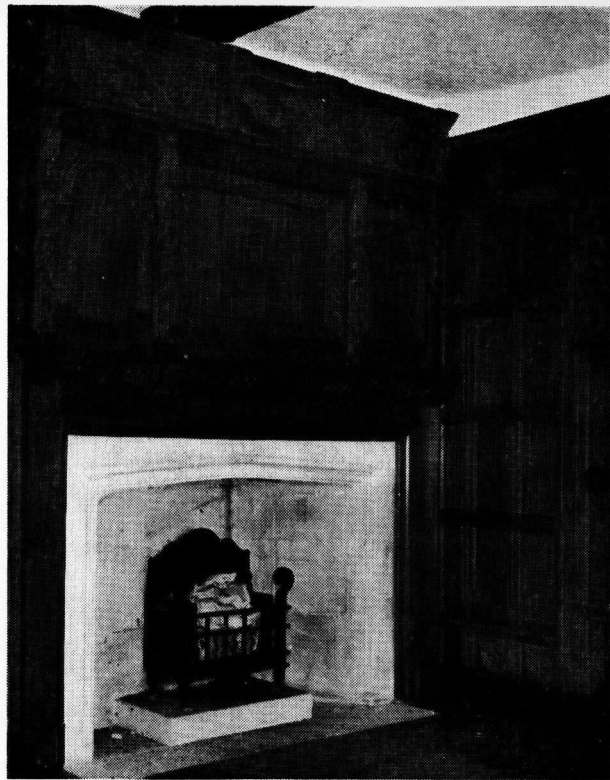


FIG. 22. The withdrawing room.

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member which now carries the line of the jettied west gable across the other two gables, evidently was introduced in 1915. The photograph also shows that the ground-floor window in the north wall of the timber-framed wing was of the same width, but of less height than at present, and many of the windows still at that time retained their diagonal-leaded glazing. By the end of the nineteenth century the condition of the hall had clearly degenerated. In 1897 it was recorded that the building had fallen on evil days, being hemmed in by "pigstyes, dung-heaps and slaughter-houses".¹³ This decay was arrested in 1915, when restoration was put in hand, as recorded on the rain-water heads and on the withdrawing room overmantel. Internal modifications were not extensive except in the timber block, where they were so exhaustive as to make the original arrangement difficult to recover. In the old block, alterations were made to the service rooms and the through passage between them, and the south end of the screens passage was closed off and the fourteenth-century doorway there sealed off, to make a cloak room.

In 1938 the hall passed from the ownership of the Stanleys, and for a time demolition was threatened. In that year, however, an order was made by the Alderley Edge U.D.C. prohibiting its destruction, an order upheld by the Minister of Health. The house continued in the tenancy of Mr. Joseph Davis until 1958, becoming unoccupied on his death. In 1959 the house was listed as a building of special architectural or historic interest under the provisions of Section 30 of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1947. In the same year it came into the possession of Mr. Harry Brooks of Wilmslow, and plans have been prepared for its sympathetic restoration and rehabilitation as a residence for its new owner. It is indeed fortunate that this unique and historic building is to be preserved, particularly in view of the alarming rate of destruction of the fine old halls of the North-West.

The authors wish to express their appreciation of the assistance and co-operation of Mr. Harry Brooks, and his architect Mr. Peter Bradshaw. Acknowledgement is also made to Mr. J. M. Broadbridge for assistance in measuring the structure.

¹³ On the occasion of a visit by the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society in May, 1807. (*Transactions*, 1897, p. 182.)