

CHAPTER 4.

THE RECTORIES AND HALLS

IT has been truly said that you have not seen Cheshire if you have not seen Gawsworth, and this romantic village owes much to the charm of its old houses, particularly the Rectories and the old and new Halls. Taking pride of place, GAWSWORTH OLD RECTORY is one of the most beautiful half-timbered buildings in England. It stands in a mellowed old-world garden on rising ground in close proximity to the ancient tythe-barn, and the main west front overlooks the church pool, and the magnificent medieval church.

This much loved glebe house was built by Rector George Baguley, who was parish priest of Gawsworth from 1470 till his death in 1497, and he is thought to have completed the erection of the building about the year 1480.

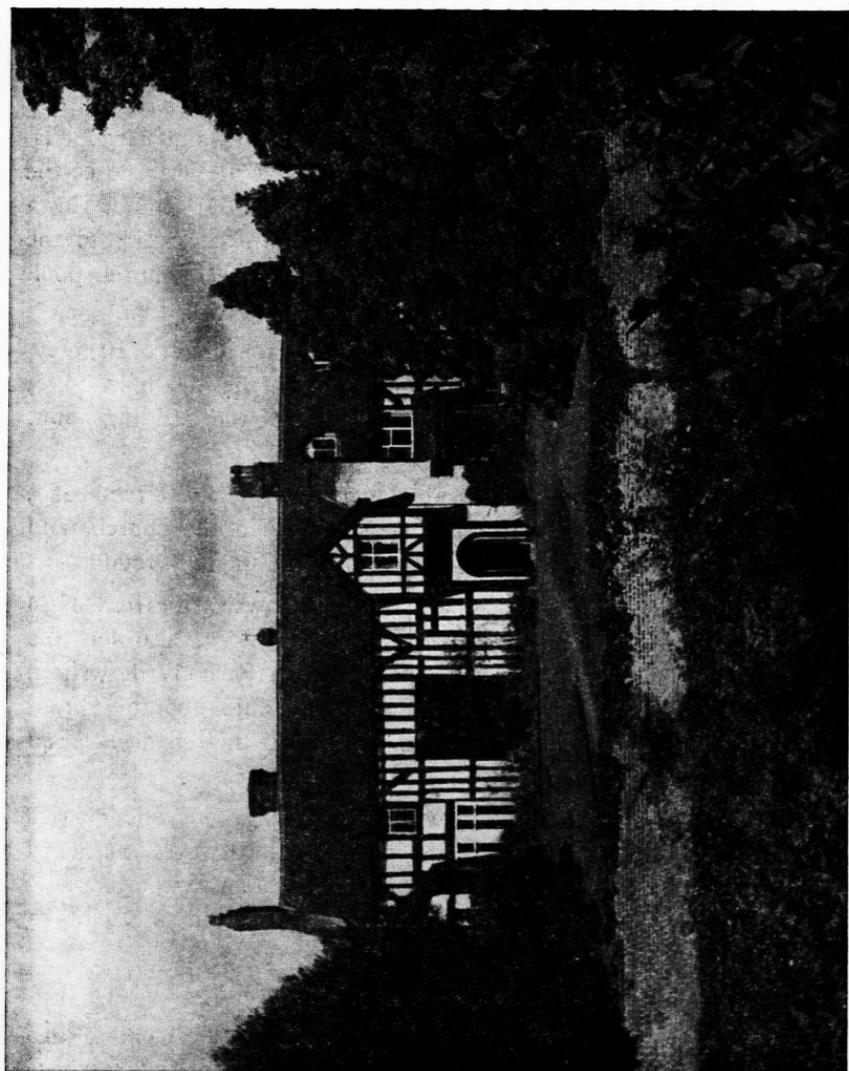
Elias Ashmole,¹ in his notes about Gawsworth taken circa 1654, recorded copies of interesting inscriptions formerly in the church, and now destroyed, one verse stating "The Rectory did Baguley found."

Rector William Hall, who was incumbent of Gawsworth from 1724 to 1769, and during his residence restored the rectory, also left the following valuable note in the parish register for the year 1761, written in beautiful penmanship, "Words written on ye South door of Gawsworth Church, but now almost worn out: 'Fitton this chancel raised from ye ground but Baguley ye Rectory did found.'"²

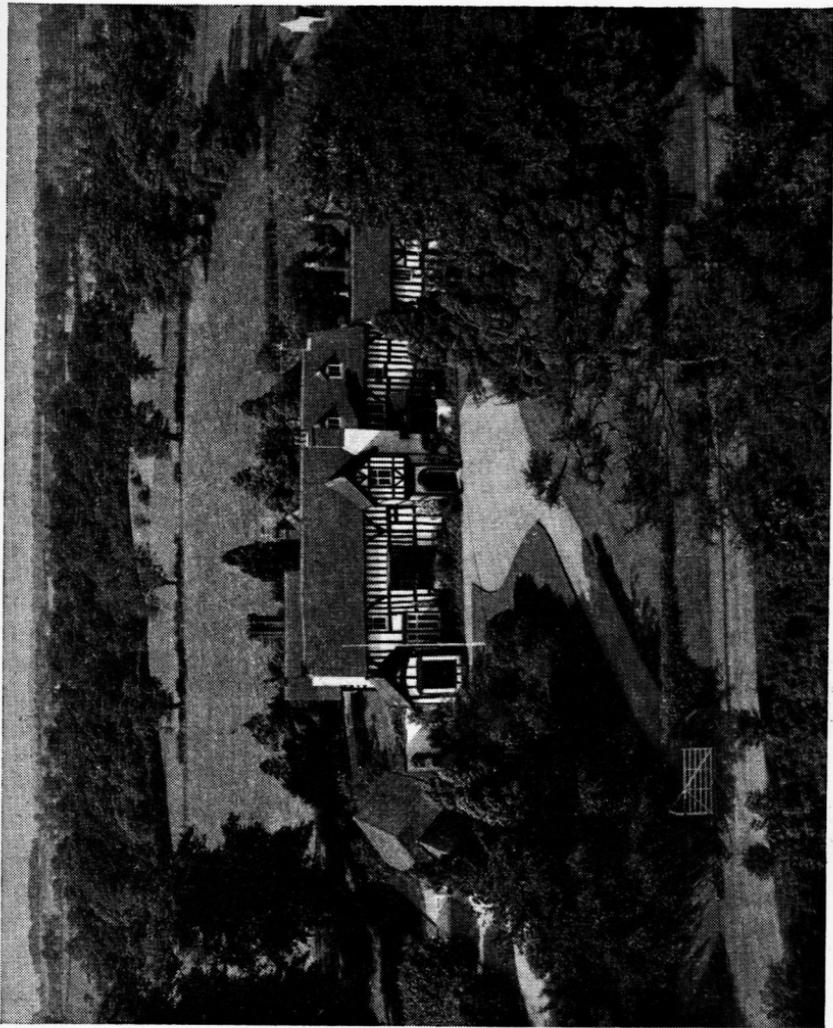
The main facade of the rectory, with the exception of one or two minor alterations, is original work of the time of Edward IV. The heavy Kerridge grey slates were removed from the roofs about a century ago, and the present red tile substituted, which time has weathered into a

¹ Elias Ashmole was the brother-in-law of the Rev. Henry Newcome, Nonconformist Minister during the Commonwealth, who was Rector of Gawsworth from 1650 to 1657. Whilst he resided at the Old Rectory in 1648 Newcome married Elizabeth, daughter of Peter Mainwaring of Smallwood, who was the sister of the second wife of Elias Ashmole the founder of the famous Oxford Library. Newcome was on very friendly terms with his distinguished brother-in-law, who often stayed at Gawsworth Rectory; on one occasion he made a journey to the Peak collecting plants and other curiosities.

² In the Randle Holmes MSS. in the British Museum (Harl. MSS. 2161) the antiquary records that an inscription in the "south chancell window" read "Pray for the soul of George Baguley rector of this church who built the rectory anew." Obviously the present rectory occupies the site of a still more ancient house, probably dating from Norman times.



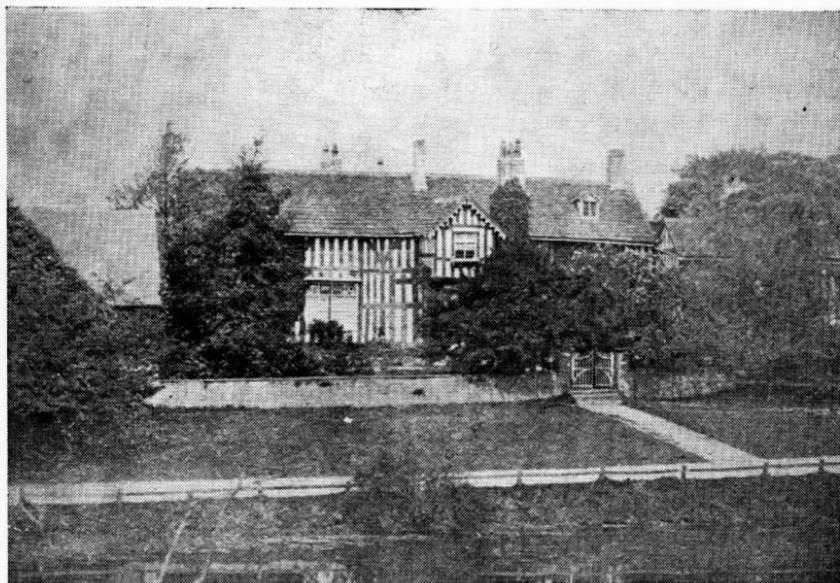
Gawsworth Rectory. Before restoration.



Gawsworth Old Rectory.
The fifteenth century south facade photographed from the Church Tower.



Morris Dancers at Gawsworth.



Gawsworth Old Rectory, circa 1860.



Gawsworth Old Rectory, circa 1870, before being re-roofed in tile.

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kinder blending with the traditional black and white colouring of the timber fabric as a whole. The rectory was never thatched, as suggested by some writers, and the Terrier of 1783 clearly states that the "Parsonage house is chiefly built of timber, covered with slate." The brick wall which encloses the house to the south and the short drive were also added at the time the roof was tiled. Formerly a quaint low lichen-covered wall with stone copings and pillared gateway gave access to the garden, whilst in the foreground was a pleasant green sward, falling away to the church lane.

The timber-framed houses of the county are a feature of the Cheshire scene, and the lovely glebe house of Gawsworth takes pride of place for age and the unique distinction of having been continuously lived in, since the time of its erection. The Old Rectory is older by a century than the neighbouring half-timbered halls of East Cheshire, and the very solid plainness of its construction no doubt largely accounts for its survival with so little new timber having been introduced into the main framing.

Gawsworth Old Rectory today with its massive timbers, curved braces, and the manner in which all the wooden framing is slotted and pegged into one rigid structure, reflects the enduring quality of the oak used and the superb skill and ability of the fifteenth-century builders. In plan the building is long and low with three projections, roughly E-shaped, from the main western facade. The two-storied porch is placed in the centre of the building, and contains a half-glazed arched outer storm door, with a most unusual hood-shaped weather moulding, which in turn is surmounted by a delightful small room, long called Theophila's Bower, which oversails the outer entrance to the great hall. The inner door, a magnificent example of its day, is still secured by the quaint oak original fastenings. It swings on a massive shoulder without hinges, and the back is solidly cradled. Despite its great weight the door is perfectly balanced and swings with the slightest pressure. The iron closing ring of the door is a remarkable survival of the blacksmith's art of 1480. The circular rose or scutcheon-plate (diam. 8 inches) is pierced with four groups of triple holes alternating with rose-headed bolts, and has a raised rim of fret pattern. The heavy oval drop handle is of flat section cut with elaborate design, with medial ribs at its base and small projections on either side of the square spindle.

It is difficult to understand the Victorian taste which on various occasions enamelled the ancient oak in a variety of colours, and when



Gawsworth Old Rectory, circa 1872.



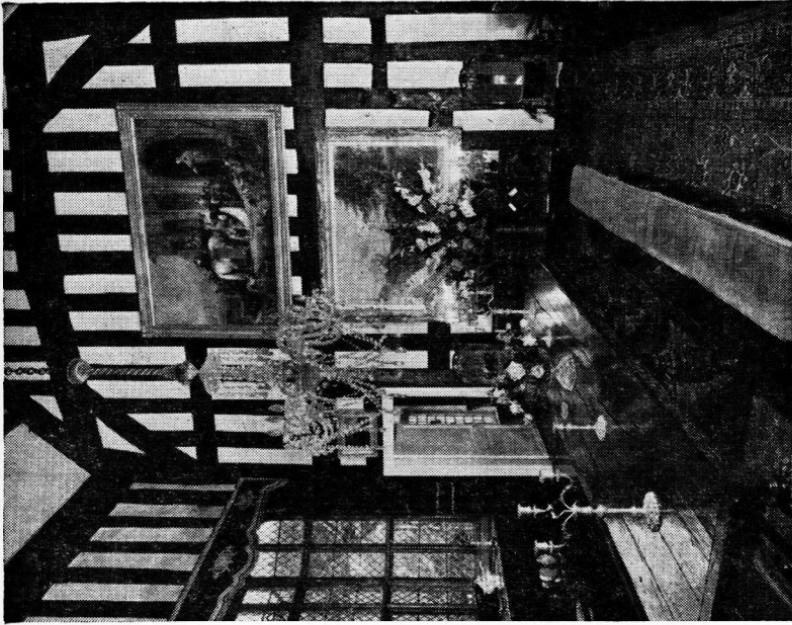
Gawsworth Old Rectory.
The Forecourt looking North, 1957.



The Great Hall.

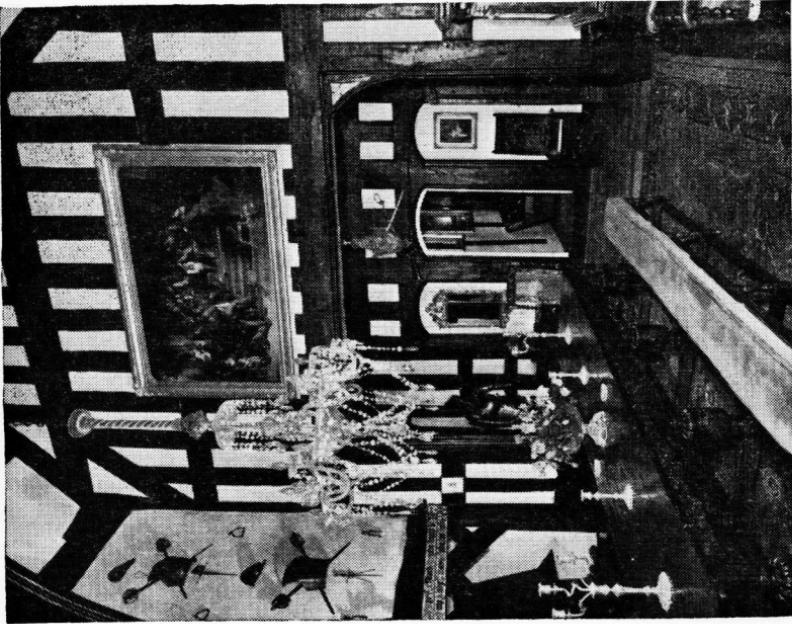


Rector Hall's restoration plaque in the Hall Bedroom.
Gawsworth Old Rectory.

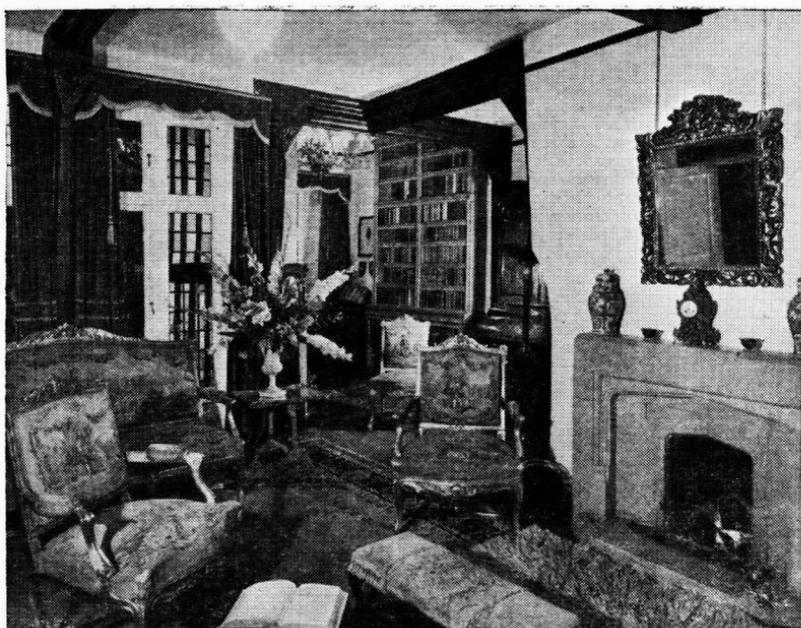


The Great Hall, looking West.

Gawsworth Old Rectory.



The Great Hall, looking East.



The Library looking South.



The Library looking West.
Gawsworth Old Rectory.

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the paint was scraped off in 1908 it was found that various layers of enamel had at one time been grained and varnished actually to resemble oak.

Seats are placed on either side of the porch, and in the east wall the cavity which formerly contained the old parish records was probably the site of the pre-Reformation wayfarer's cupboard.

The chief glory of the old rectory is the great timbered hall, open to the steep pitched roof. It is of Queen's Post formation, having a lovely carved and gilded boss placed between the two enormous carved struts supporting the main tie beam. Throughout, the timbering is uniformly placed, and the proportions are unchanged, with the exception of the loss of the staircase and gallery at the west end. The former large hall window has been converted into a large bay which, it must be conceded, was a good improvement in design, even if the timber used in its construction has since rotted, and has had to be renewed in recent years. The four shields of arms emblazoned on the windows of the great hall were formerly in the church, and have been put in the wrong way round if intended to be seen from the inside of the hall. The arms include Davenport of Henbury and the Erdeswick and Egerton families.

The early methods of heating a great hall such as the noble example of Gawsorth were primitive, and what became of the open fireplace nothing is known. Early this century ugly and cumbersome radiators served, but when these were thrown out in 1904 a poorly designed fireplace was erected against the north wall, employing as a mantel-shelf an elaborately carved and heraldically coloured Tudor home-coming board, which for many years had hung under Theophila's Bower.

The inscription reads:

“SYR EDWARD FYTON KNIGHT Wt MY LADY MARE
ffYTON HYS WIFFE.”

It commemorates Sir Edward Fitton who died in 1547 aged about 47, and his wife Mary, younger daughter and co-heiress of Sir Guiscard Harbottle Knight of Co. Northumberland. Both were married at Gawsorth, the widow dying in 1556. The board is beautifully carved and embellished with two shields of arms, each of four quarterings. That on the left of the inscription displays the arms of:

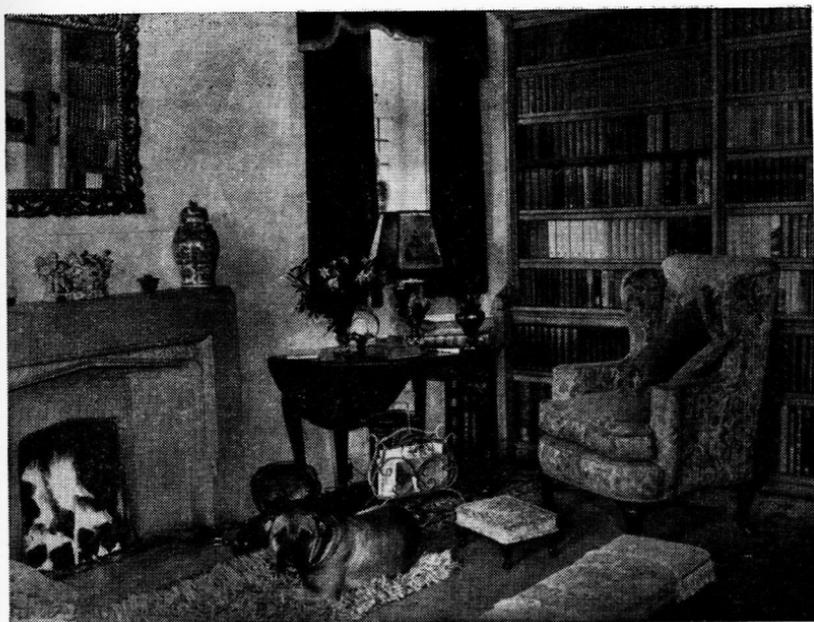
- (a) Orreby of Gawsorth—Argent two chevrons and a canton Gules.
- (b) Siddington—Argent a chevron between five cross-crosslets fetchee three in base sable.
- (c) Bechton—Azure, three spade irons argent.



The Drawing Room looking South-East.



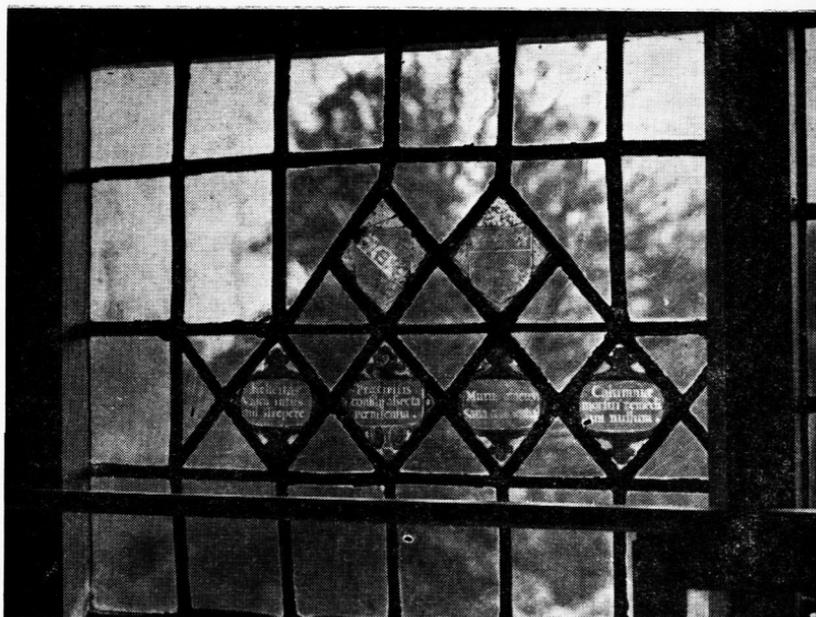
The Drawing Room looking West.
Gawsworth Old Rectory.



A corner of the Library.



The Morning Room.
Gawsworth Old Rectory.



Gawsworth Old Rectory.
Some ancient glass.

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- (d) Fitton of Gawsworth—Argent a canton gules overall on a bend azure three garbs Or.

The companion shield carved on the right of the board displays:

- (e) Harbottle of Northumberland—Azure three iciles bendways Or.
(f) Welwick—Argent three escallops Gules.
(g) Charron—Sable three water bougets argent.
(h) Manboucher—Argent three pots Gules.

The lesser rooms to the east and west of the great hall retain much of the original timbering, and the medieval character of the house is preserved by the unchanged proportions of the half-timbered steward's room, the brewhouse and the kitchen. The great open fireplace has been bricked in, but some seven feet of space behind the existing walling is a reminder of more spacious times, when the spit could no doubt roast a carcass in its entirety. The many hooks secured to the kitchen roof beams are also pleasant survivals of a by-gone age. Much old glass survives, mostly in new leads, but some windows still retain the old fashioned and quite delightful concave and convex glazing.

Of the bedrooms the hall chamber still preserves the name used when access was possible from the great hall staircase and gallery, and contains over the fireplace Rector Hall's overmantel, bearing his inscription commemorating his restoration and "Decoravit" in the first half of the eighteenth century.

The delightful Mary Fitton bedroom, situated immediately to the east of the central porch, contains a rare window having four panes of Tudor glass, painted with the following Latin lines:

*Pælicitas unica intus nil strepere
Præcipitis consilii assecla penitentia
Murus ænus sana conscientia
Calumniæ morsui remedium nullum.*

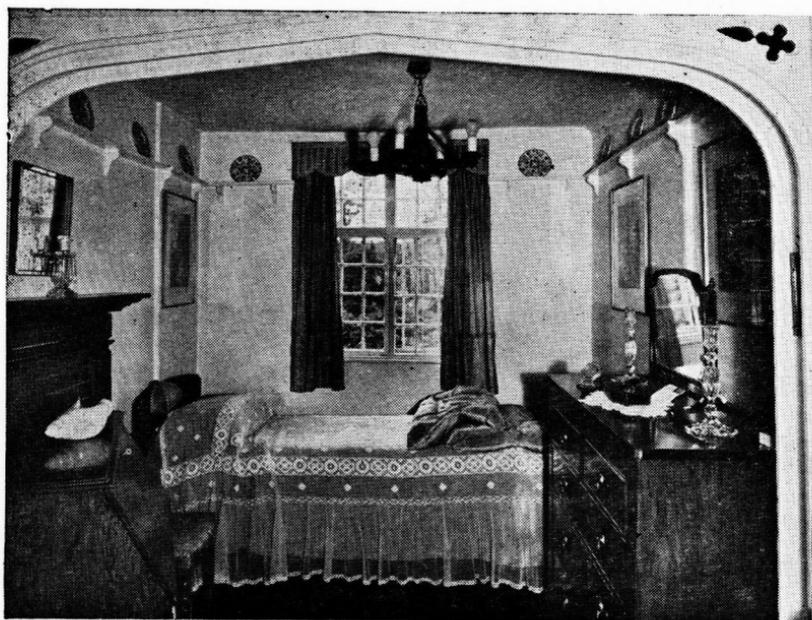
Freely translated:

The only happiness is in inward peace.
Repentance is the follower of rash counsel.
A healthy conscience is a wall of brass.
There is no cure for the bite of slander.

What rare advice for a country parson to bequeath to his successors—a pocket sermon to be seen morning and evening. It is thought that these pungent lines were written by Rector William Hall about the year 1750. Born in 1692 he came to Gawsworth by way of Siddington and Marton. On his presentation in 1724 he resigned both these parishes,



The Mary Fitton Bedroom.



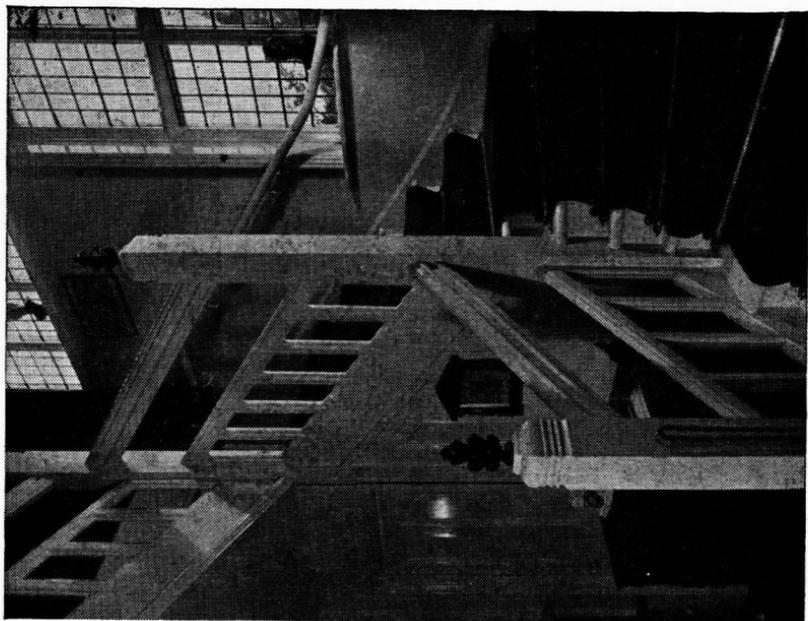
Theophila's Bower.
Gawsworth Old Rectory.



The "Hall" Bedroom.



The Kitchen looking South-East.
Gawsworth Old Rectory.



The New Staircase.



Old Staircase in East Wing.

Gawsworth Old Rectory.

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and remained rector of Gawsworth until the time of his death in 1769, having held the living for no less than forty-six years.

One of Gawsworth's most distinguished sons was Dr. John Latham, who was born on December 29th, 1761, at the Rectory, the residence of his great uncle, the Rev. William Hall, Rector of the parish. It is supposed that he received his earlier education at the Macclesfield Grammar School under Dr. Henry Ingles, or his brilliant successor Dr. Davies. He subsequently proceeded to Brasenose College, Oxford, from which University he obtained the degree of M.D. in 1788. From 1813 to 1819 he was President of the College of Physicians. He finally left London in 1829 for his estate at Bradwell Hall, Sandbach, which he had purchased and where he died in 1843, in his 82nd year.

The Mary Fitton bedroom has quaint uneven oak floors, and preserves all its ancient timbering intact. For many years this apartment has always been accepted as the haunted room, and many visitors view it with some apprehension!

Possibly the most beautiful bedroom in the Old Rectory is the long apartment adjacent to the original east wing staircase, which survives exactly as it was fashioned in the fifteenth century. The open roof, the lovely timbering, and the exquisite views from the lattice windows, make it one of the most beautiful rooms in Cheshire.

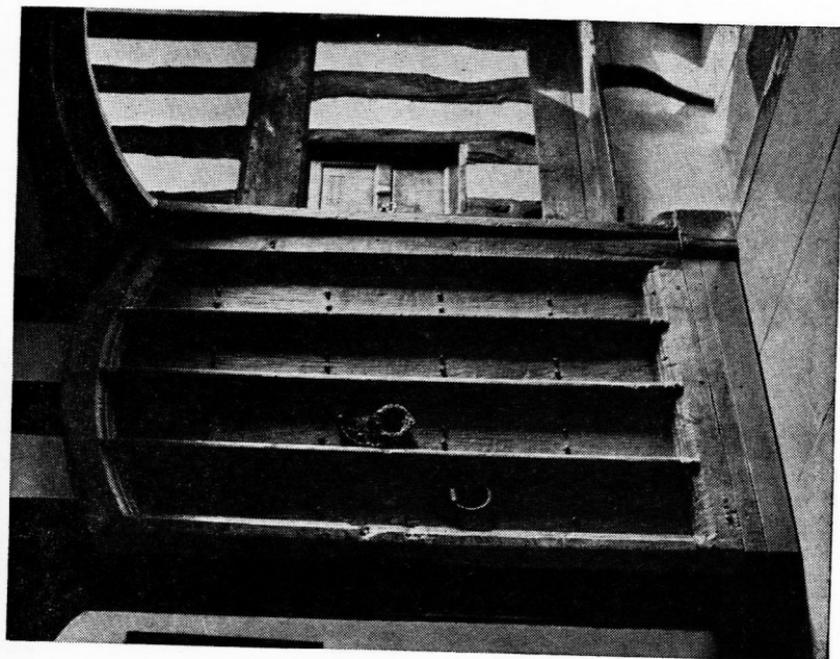
Although the north side of the rectory contains the new wing it must be agreed that it was added in excellent taste by Rector the Hon. Henry Augustus Stanhope, shortly after he was presented to the living in 1872.

He was a man of position, being the son of the Earl Stanhope, and his wife, the Hon. Mildred Vernon was a daughter of Lord Vernon of Poynton and Sudbury. Their joint additions resulted in the Old Rectory possessing eleven bedrooms and four entertaining rooms, which considerably embarrassed their successors.

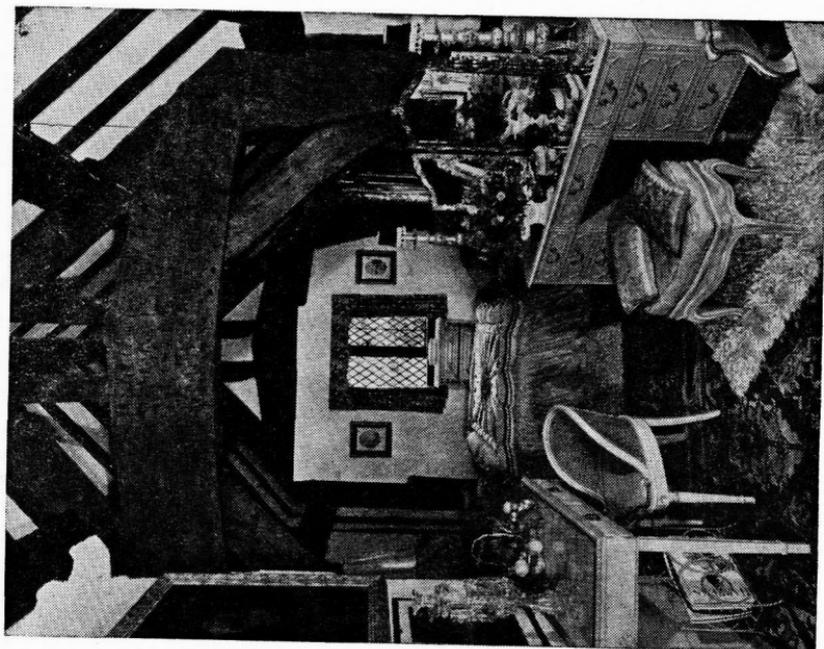
Actually older than the church and rectory is the giant cruck framing of the tythe-barn forming the eastern wing of the stable yard. The original tie beams, post and ridge tree are gone, but the great trees supporting the later structure are possibly the oldest survivals in this ancient and romantic corner of Cheshire.

One of Gawsworth's most respected rectors, the Rev. Edward Polehampton, who loved Gawsworth and the Old Rectory, wrote:

“Peacefully lies this interesting old home of generations of parish priests. Wonderful is its setting, beautiful at all seasons of the year.



The 15th Century Inner Door to the Great Hall.



Bedroom in the East Wing.

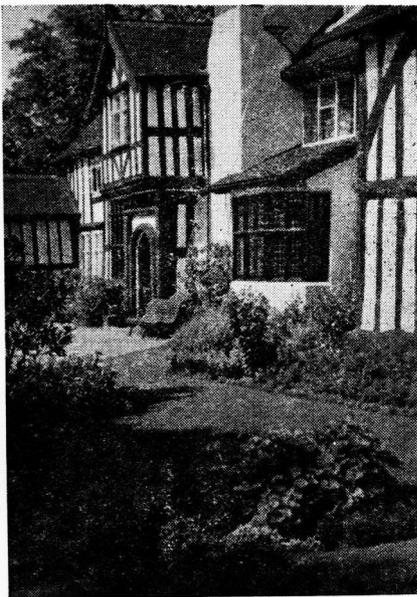
Gawsworth Old Rectory.



Details of Queen's Post Roof in Great Hall.



The Old Rectory Garden—the two limes leading to the dove patch.



The Porch and Study Window.

Gawsworth Old Rectory.



Gawsworth Old Rectory.

The North side, 1872 addition by the Hon. Henry Augustus Stanhope, Rector of
Gawsworth 1872/79.

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The budding of spring, the glory of summer, the decay of autumn, the hardness of winter, each provide in turn some new charm to make glad the heart of those whose privilege it is to live within its walls. The rustle of leaf, the song of bird, the ripple of water as gentle as zephyr plays it into smiles, the caw of jackdaw round the old church tower, aye, the hoot of owl in stillness of night even, combine to transform sadness of heart into joy, darkness into light."

In its long history many well-known people have visited and lived at the Old Rectory, and it is not surprising that the old world charm and medieval character of the ancient half-timbered, fifteenth century parsonage aroused the love and admiration of generations of parish priests and visitors. The Rev. Henry Newcome, who was Rector of Gawsworth from 1650 to 1657, was obviously very distressed when he and his family bade good-bye to the Rectory in 1657, and he records in his diary—"On Thursday April 16th (1657) the carts came and carried away all our goods towards Manchester. I was sadly affected and broken all to pieces in leaving the house."

A charming description of the ancient glebe house, as it appeared in the year 1818, was given by Mrs. Brandt to Thomas Hughes, F.S.A.¹ Her husband, the Rev. Francis Brandt, M.A., was curate at Gawsworth from 1818 to 1844, when he was presented to the living of Aldford near Chester by the Marquis of Westminster.

The Brandts arrived at Gawsworth during the rectorship of the Rev. Henry Forster Mills (1803-1827) who was non-resident. This clergyman never once saw his living, being the son-in-law of the Archbishop of York, and Chancellor of York Minster. In this respect he was no better or worse than his predecessor or successor, both of whom were also non-resident. As a result Gawsworth, for almost a century, was without a resident rector; the clergy, although receiving the rich tithes, were content to leave the welfare of their cure in the hands of poorly-paid curates.

At the time when the Rev. Henry Forster Mills and his family were wintering at Bath, the Brandts arrived at Gawsworth. What could be more charming or old-world than the following picture of the new curate and his wife, recently married, arriving in the village.

"It was Christmas Eve in the year 1818 that, leaving the high road, and driving through pretty rural lanes, we entered the parish of Gawsworth, and

¹ Thomas Hughes (1826-1890), a former distinguished Cheshire antiquary and editor of the *Cheshire Sheaf* (1s.: v.3).

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first came into sight of the beautiful old church, destined to be the scene of my husband's early ministry for five and twenty years!

"The day was cold the trees and hedges leafless and bare; but they were thickly covered, and the ground was crisped with a sharp hoar frost. Never shall I forget my first feelings on looking upon that peaceful, lovely spot! We drove up the green to the little garden gate. What a picture did that old Rectory House present! It was very old, built of wood and plaster, gable ended, and painted black and white. Over the centre porch, projected far out, was a bedroom, which in after years was named "Theophila's Bower," after a young friend who had often slept there. The windows were many shaped and sized, and glazed with small panes, leaded. This, then was to be our home, 'for weal and for woe'—very lovely to look upon! I thought it so, at any rate; and nothing to my memory, can be like it again, as it struck me on that afternoon of that December day.

"Our two maidens came down the garden to meet us (our man was with us), and quickly following came my husband's brother Henry, who had been actively busy to get the workmen out of the way, and have all things in order for our reception. This he had done and soon left us to join his mother and sisters for their Christmas Dinner. It was a strange moment to me—no words can tell it, no pen can paint it!

"The porch was entered by a half-glass outer door; within were benches on either side, and inserted in the wall was an iron safe for the registers, with a moulding round of oak, curiously carved. The inner door was like that in our old churches, of heavy oak, studded thickly with large nails and strong and dressed oaken bolts. From this door we passed into a hall, open to the roof—an old fashioned staircase leading out of it to the best, or state bed-chamber, and to that only. A handsome massive arch was thrown across the middle, and the window was large and filled with coats of arms and other devices in painted glass: it was a beautiful and imposing room to enter! Beyond was a smaller, but good-sized sitting room, with painted cross beams in the ceiling, held together in the centre by a gilt rose—denoting the silence to be observed respecting all which passed 'beneath the rose' within those walls. The rest of the house was curiously connected, by mysterious little flights of shut-up stairs and winding passages—a dreamy romantic house for two newly married young people to come to!

"We sat down to our first meal soon after, and had scarcely done so when the five silvery bells of our Church rang out a merry peal to welcome their new Pastor!

"Christmas morning came, and our people gathered in the Church. The service was beautifully gone through, as it ever, ever was by him! No, the like will never be heard by me again—I know it I feel it daily!

"The choir consisted of men, with every description of musical instrument under the sun; and when the 10th Anthem was given out to be sung, I rose with the rest of the congregation; and as I was feeling very quietly happy, and disposed to be pleased with everything, I have no doubt I looked so; until the leader, a man with one eye, laying aside his clarionet, and taking up



The fifteenth century Closing Ring to the inner door of the Great Hall



Visitors.
Gawsworth Old Rectory.

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the solo part, in a cracked voice sang, 'Thy wife shall be as the fruitful vine, &c.' I can feel now the hot flush and tingling sensation which rushed into my cheeks; but everybody looked so serious, and as if it were quite the right and proper form to go through, that I tried to do the same, and stood it out—I believe, however, I ought to have sat still! Then let me record what in after years befell this same anthem. My husband found that it prevented the young married people from coming to church—he therefore ordered that it should not be sung unless by special desire. On the strength of that promise from the Pastor, a young couple made their first appearance in church; in due time, however, the 10th Anthem appeared on the board. My husband said quietly to the Clerk, 'that must not be sung!' upon which the old man very audibly said, 'Yo're desired not to sing that anthem!' There was a slight pause, but evident symptoms of resistance, when the Clerk called out—'Yo are desired NOT to sing that anthem!'—still no sign of yielding—there was even a little tuning up—when the old man, tried past his patience, struck his fist on the desk, and then, shaking it at the choir, in a stentorian voice called out 'YO MUNNA sing that anthem!' This was decisive—they all sat down, simultaneously abashed; the 'Hundredth Psalm' was put up, and sung, and from that time forward the 10th Anthem was heard no more in Gawsworth Church!"

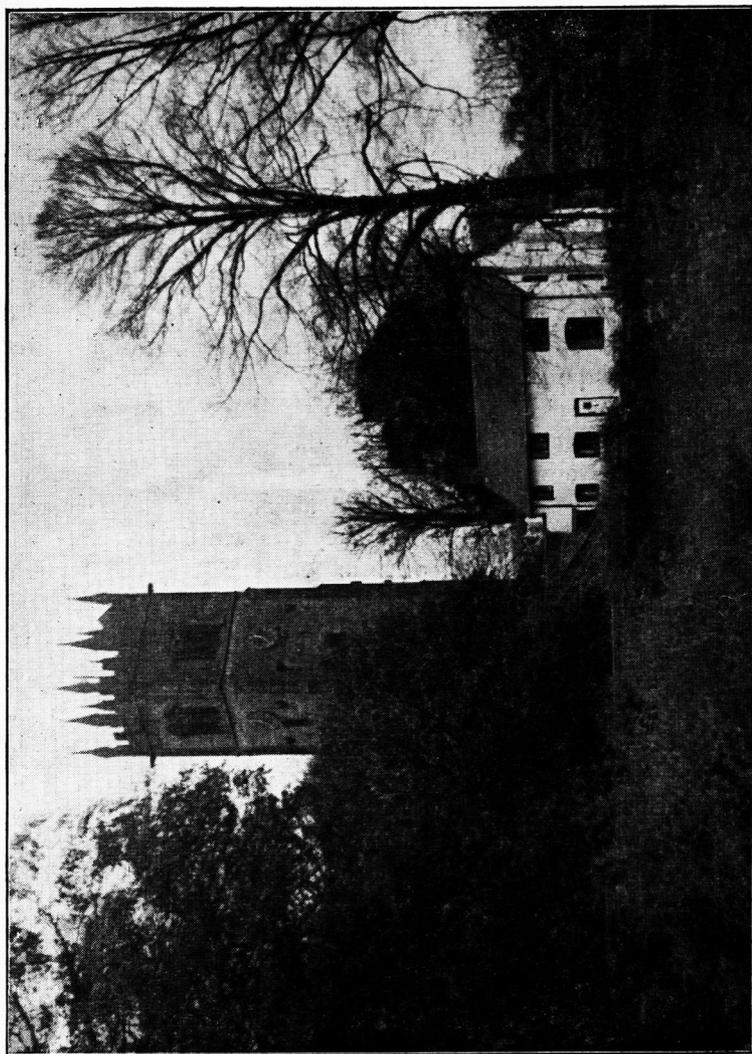
Alas, many of Mrs. Brandt's young children lie under the ancient yew tree, in that part of the old churchyard which overlooks the rectory pool.

In another account of the village and rectory, as it appeared in the year 1818, Mrs. Brandt records: "The Red Rover Coach ran twice a week between Manchester and Congleton, and the driver made this little detour now and then, to drop parcels at the Rectory, and please his passengers by a sight of this lovely spot. I believe there were fifteen miles of by-roads; and it was scarcely possible, when first we went there, for a carriage to get to us even up the avenue. A parish plough we found was kept to plough in the ruts!"

Within recent years the house has been occupied by the author, who as patron of the living, has accomplished considerable reparation to the fabric of the building, and in restoring the house and grounds to complete order he hopes they will be handed down to delight generations yet unborn.

Gawsworth Old Rectory is indeed a remarkable survival from ancient times, and loved for its picturesque beauty, its rare setting, and for its rich variety of interests.

THE NEW RECTORY stands at the foot of the church steps, and is approached by the beautiful avenue of limes, planted about 1820. The house was built in 1707 by Lord Mohun as the village school, and was



Gawsworth House before restoration in 1949.

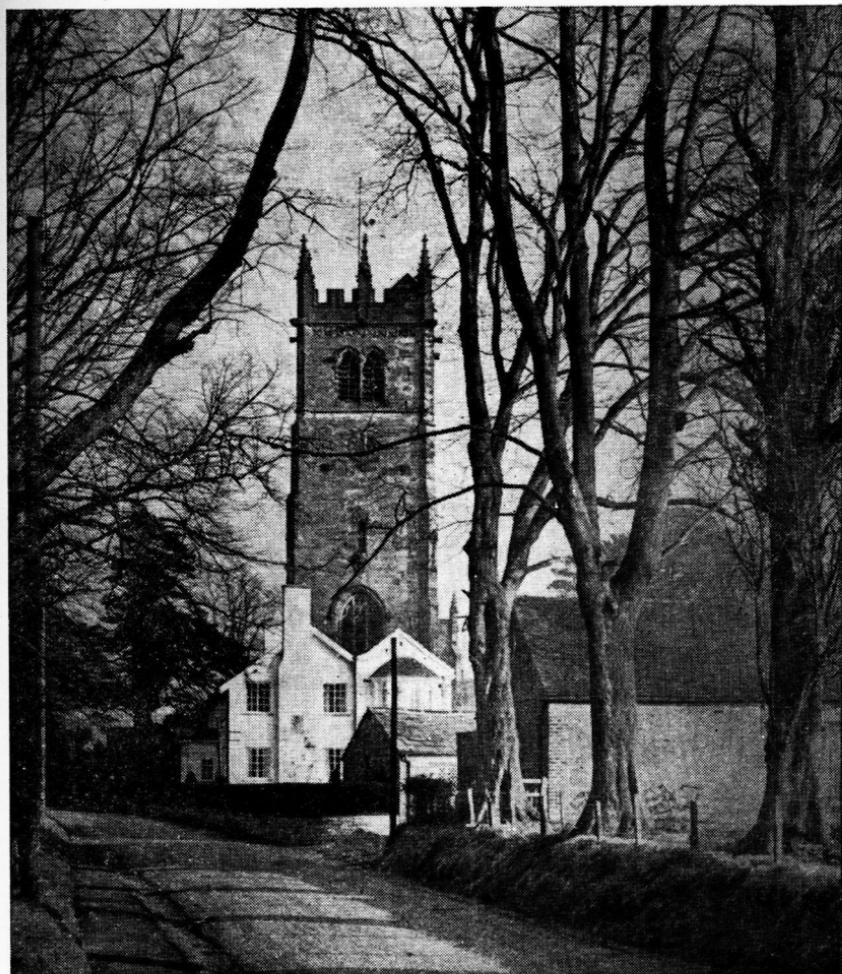
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erected at the same period as the New Hall. Bishop Gastrell in his *Notitia Cestriensis* completed in the first quarter of the 18th century records: "A Little School erected by Ld Mohun, adjoining to (the) Churchyard, for teaching Eng(lish) and to write : but no Endowment."

Apparently it survived as the village day school until 1832, when the present school house was built at the Warren. The late Rector Polehampton, however, thinks it ceased to function as a school some years earlier, and that a room in one of the Moss Houses served for this purpose. At all events in the years which followed 1832, it served a variety of purposes, being in turn two cottages, a post office, a village shop and a parish reading room. The author recovered the property by auction in 1949, and as a result of the decayed condition of the structure much rebuilding was necessary before the house could be extended southwards. To make this possible, the ancient churchyard wall to the east had to be underpinned and a vast quantity of soil removed, to permit of the new building. This in turn necessitated the erection of a strong retaining wall to prevent any movement of the high level ground to the south east. In the surviving original part of the house all the roof beams have been exposed, and the new building fitted throughout in oak, with the exception of the bedroom fireplaces which have pine 18th century period mantelpieces, removed in recent years from Woburn Abbey. The porch was brought from Brook House, Knutsford, also all the yard cobble stones, when this early 18th century house was demolished.

During the process of remodelling the old schoolhouse the adjacent fields were added to the property, also the coach house building and stable erected by the Thornicrofts of Thornicroft Hall, Siddington, about 1850 This enabled the building nearest the house to be converted into a detached study, and some fine Jacobean panelling purchased many years ago at Pershore Hall, Worcestershire, was introduced into the apartment with outstanding success. Similarly the carved stone Jacobean fireplace from Pershore Hall was adapted to the needs of the dining room of the house.

When the work was completed, the gardens reformed, and a carved restoration plaque added to the west chimney stack, the property was renamed Gawsworth House, and so it continued until the present rector, the Rev. William Edgar Clarke, took up residence in May 1953, when the house became known as the New Rectory. The charming old early eighteenth century porch before being brought to Gawsworth from



The new Rectory, erected originally as the village school in 1707, remodelled 1949.

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Knutsford, had a most interesting history. For many years it served as the entrance to the home of Lady Jane Stanley, sister of Edward, Twelfth Earl of Derby, and there are pleasant references to the house and its associations in Mrs. Gaskell's "Cranford". In Green's history of Knutsford, published in 1859, occurs the following entertaining account of the house and its distinguished occupants in the 18th century :

"With the past notabilities of Knutsford it would be unpardonable not to mention the Lady Jane Stanley, who maintained a very liberal establishment at Brook House. In her day she filled a very important and influential position in the town, and her memory is still highly respected as well for her beneficence as for her other sterling qualities. She was sister of the Earl of Derby, who was grandfather of the present Earl, the father of the late Countess of Wilton. It is said, she was so deeply offended by her brother's marriage with Miss Farren, that she directed her body to be interred at Great Budworth, rather than at Ormskirk, lest the dust of an actress should mingle with her own; and a little before her death she is reported to have suggested, or rather uttered an epitaph that might have been inscribed on her tomb—

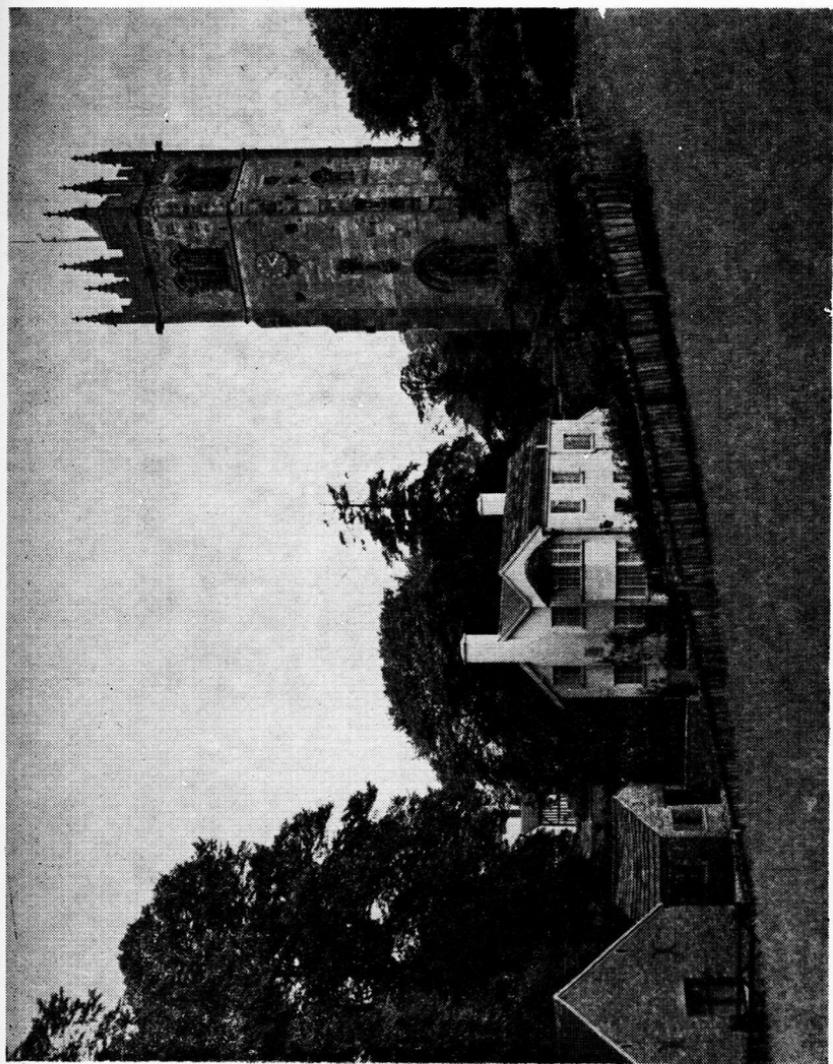
"A maid I lived, — a maid I died, —

I never was asked, — and never denied."

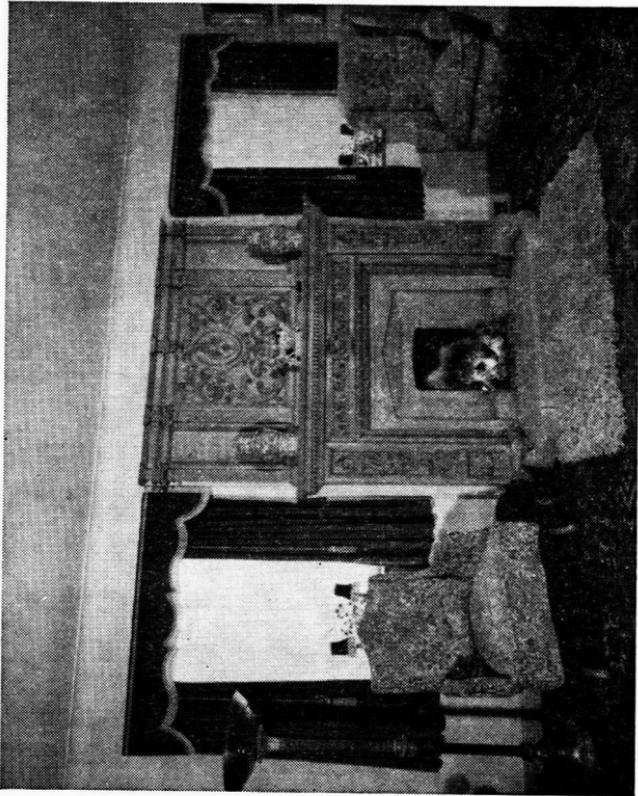
For some unknown reason Lady Jane disliked to see men and women linked together, i.e. walking arm in arm; and in her donations for the pavement of the town, provided that a single flag in breadth should be the limit of her generosity,—but she did not specify how broad the single flag was to be, and I fear her wishes are evaded, and the disapproved linking together often indulged in: the chief security for her order being observed is the disagreeable fact that in many places the streets and consequently the raised pavements are too narrow to allow of more than a very slender footpath—so that if the lasses occupy the flags, the swains must either walk behind, or pick their way in the channel.

Dr. Howard, who was her contemporary, and Lady Jane were both eager listeners out for news. The mail-coach in those days passed each of their houses, and whenever the guard, as guards generally did, knew of any event of importance, as a victory, a royal marriage, or a change of ministry, he was under covenant, with a reward of five shillings each time, to fire off a pistol as he passed Brook House; the report called forth a man servant, who hastened to the Inn where the mail-coach changed horses, paid the punctual guard his gratuity, and bore back in triumph the first newspaper which reached the town, or the first intelligence which the guard's mouth could give. It was then an aristocratic distinction to be first to hear the news of the day;—now any man for a penny can learn every morning all events of importance happened the day before, from Petersburg to Lisbon, and from Copenhagen to Naples.

Lady Jane was beloved by her husband, and admired by the whole neighbourhood, but she had very strict notions of propriety, and of the courtesies of life,—and would not have them infringed. It was her custom to walk out



The New Rectory from the South West.



Fireplaces in the New Rectory.

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in state with a gold-headed cane, or rather staff in her hand; and she was very tenacious of the right which her noble birth gave her of keeping the wall from whomsoever she met. One day a countryman, who did not know her peculiarity, took the wall from her, and the lofty dame drew herself up, lifted her staff, and with a vigorous blow on the astonished countryman's shoulder, said to him, "Take that fellow! and remember whenever you meet a lady,—always give her the wall."

GAWSWORTH OLD HALL, the ancient home of the Fitton family, lies immediately to the east of the church. The existing building dates from the second half of the sixteenth century, and until much of the structure was demolished as a result of neglect and decay in the early eighteenth century the plan was quadrangular. Over the entrance doorway is a carved shield of arms of the Fittons with sixteen quarterings. Below the shield is the following inscription: "This sculpture was carved in the town of Galway, in Ireland, by Richard Rany, for Sir Edward Fitton, Knight, first Lord President of the whole province of Connaught and Thomond, in the year of our Lord 1570."

The first reference to the Old Hall by name is contained in an entry found in the Lichfield Episcopal Registers when John Caton was granted in December 1365 a licence for the administration of a chapel within the house of John Feyton of Gowsworth.

Much of the pageantry of Gawsworth history in former times was enacted around and within the Old Hall. Mellowed with age, there are few more satisfying sights than the spectacle of this old house seen from the lane which follows the northern extremity of the fish pools.

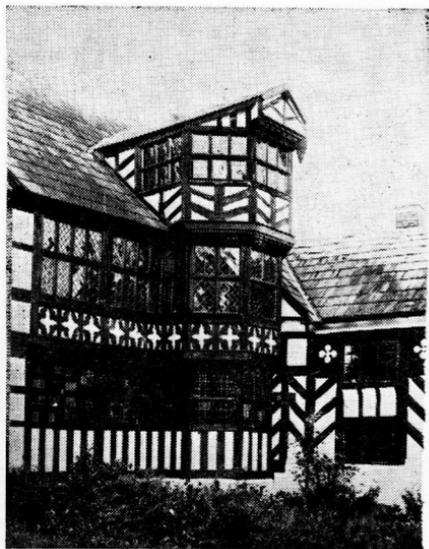
Today the Old Hall, a picturesque survival of an Elizabethan manor house, occupies the site of a still more ancient feudal capital house of which all traces are lost. It is thought the original thirteenth century hall stood farther to the north and was probably moated.

The most conspicuous feature of the present building is the fine three decker window overlooking the courtyard on the north side of the south wing.

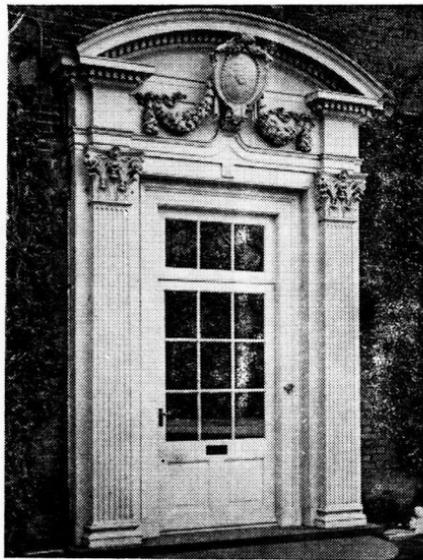
After many years of splendour the old house became neglected, and it is not surprising that the present building is rather less than half its original size. As long ago as 1694 Mrs. Grace Worthley, writing to Henry Sidney, Earl of Romney, states "My Lord Macclesfield complains that the old house (Gawsworth Hall) is ready to fall upon his head." This observation proving only too true, much of the decayed



Richards Arms on restoration plaque of the new Rectory.



Gawsworth Old Hall.
The three decker window, showing the roof
before reslating in grey slate.



Gawsworth New Hall.
Main entrance doorway.

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building being pulled down in the early eighteenth century. The rooms which survive retain their principal features and proportions largely unchanged. The timber framing of the house is original, and the intersections are of the wattle, hair and daub filling found in all contemporary timber framed houses of the period.

Photographs taken about the year 1850 reveal the property in a very neglected state, with milk cans drying on the fencing, which then extended right across the front of the house, and at the time when Earwaker was compiling his survey of East Cheshire published in 1880 he recorded that the old hall was then uninhabited.

Within comparatively recent years much re-conditioning has been undertaken and the hall is again a well maintained residence, occupied since 1937 by Mr. and Mrs. Denis de Ferranti.

During the process of reparations to the hall in recent times many curious discoveries have come to light. About the year 1920, during the tenancy of the hall by Capt. Shimwell, workmen, when opening out a bricked-up cupboard at the foot of the old secondary staircase in the south wing, found in a cavity of one of the walls, the remains of an adult skeleton of unknown age, which were later buried in the churchyard.

The house and grounds of the old hall are full of mystery and memories of the past. The secrets of the ancient manor house and park are largely unrecorded, and the romantic and tragic stories associated with its long habitation through many centuries of English history must obviously remain unknown and continue to lend colour to the old traditions of buried treasure, ancient subterranean passages, and all the pageantry of the past.

That the Fittons had a tilting ground at Gawsworth is accepted as a fact by most visitors to the village and Old Hall. Dr. George Ormerod, writing in 1819, makes no reference to this possibility, but refers to the tradition that the twenty acres of park land encompassed within a noble wall had possibly been used for wrestling and other rural sports.

Joseph Mayer made a careful survey of Gawsworth in 1849 and seemed to be quite satisfied that the formation of the raised walks and mounds to the south of the old hall established the fact beyond question that Gawsworth possessed one of the best preserved tilting grounds in existence. Richard Brooke, however, advanced the opinion

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that the banks and mounds at Gawsworth were possibly the only remains of pleasure gardens.

Whether or not the Fittons occupied such a high position that they possessed their own tilting ground, and that the medieval knightly pageantry of water jousting was practised on the pools, remains a very doubtful tradition. It must, however, be admitted that such tournaments would have been very dear to the hearts of many generations of Fighting Fittons. The fact, too, that the compilers of the six-inch Ordnance Map mark the site "tilting ground" indicates that the cartographers must have looked at this romantic site and decided the statement was not entirely fabulous.

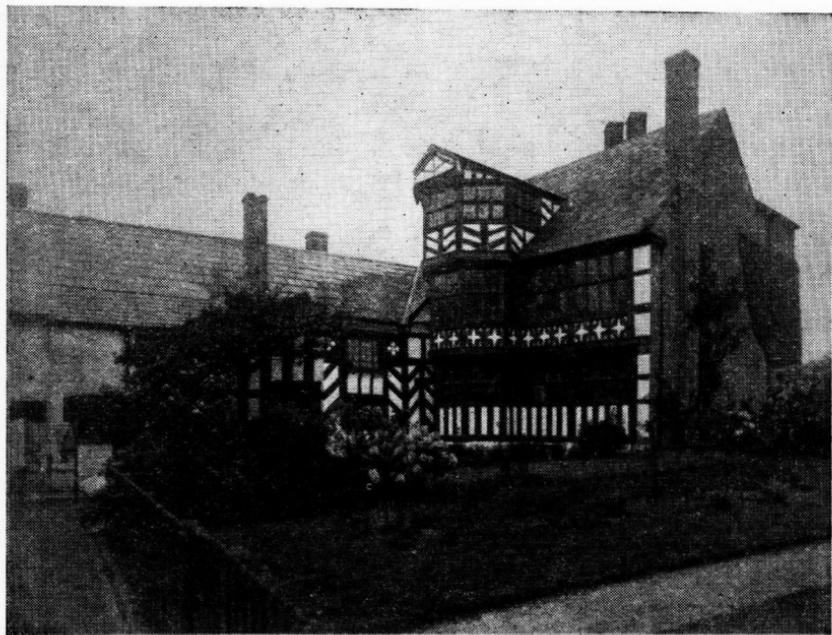
To the west side of the old hall is a quite remarkable raised mound which is sometimes given the name of the Bow Shot. Very obviously the great park of the hall was formerly the scene of many notable gatherings, and the existing layout does not suggest any connection with the formal hanging gardens, raised walks, terraces, and flower gardens usually found in close proximity to the more important old English country houses.

Unfortunately the so-called tilting ground has largely disappeared in recent years, and the ancient park wall is much decayed and dilapidated. Most antiquaries, however, are agreed that although it is very much to be doubted if the tournament ground ever existed as such, the Old Hall Park was certainly the scene of wrestling, sword fighting and other sports until well into the eighteenth century. A very famous display was given in honour of the visit of the Duke of Monmouth when making his progress through Cheshire in 1682. He stayed at the Old Hall as the guest of Charles Gerard first Earl of Macclesfield. A large assembly witnessed the ill-fated Monmouth's visit,¹ and shortly after his departure on the 18th September he was arrested. Later in the same month Mr.

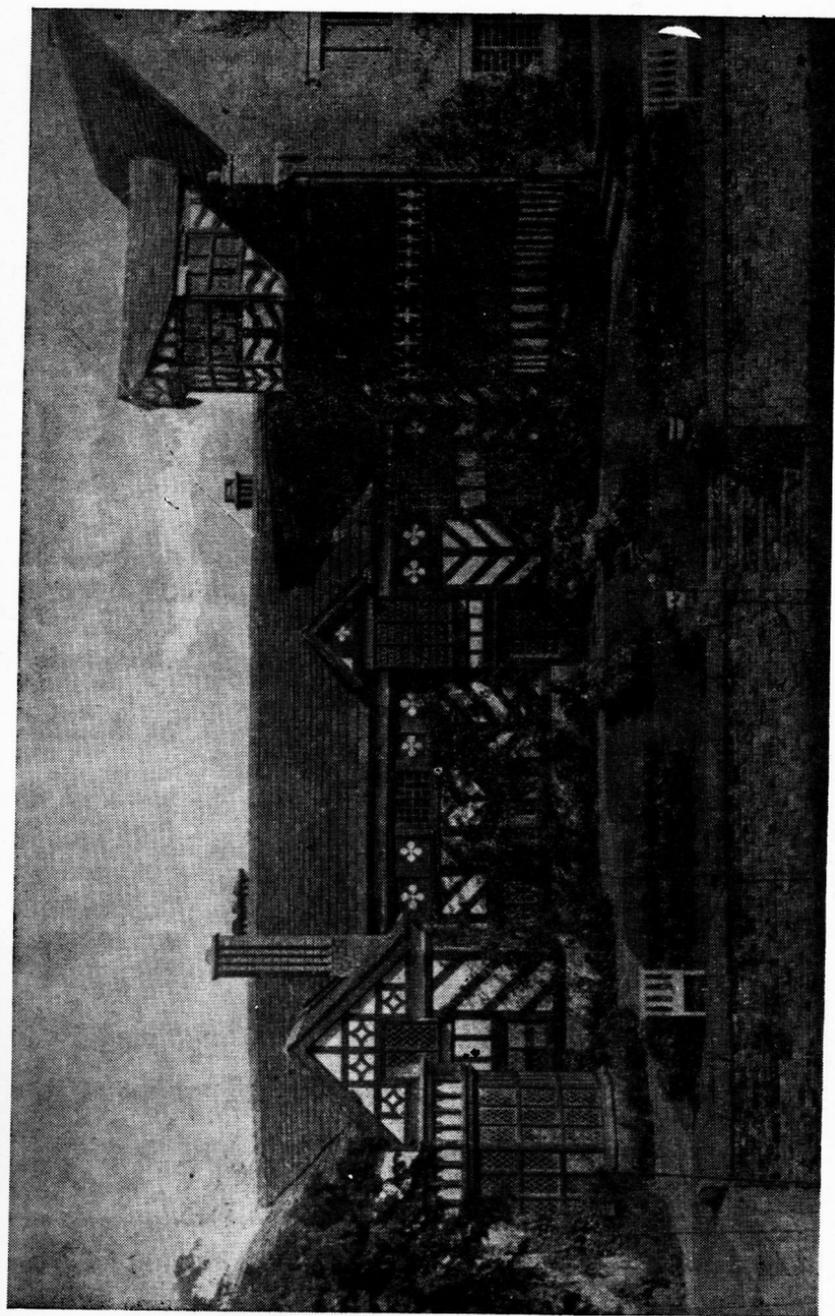
¹ At the examination of witnesses the following damning information was obtained: "That upon Friday, September 15, the Duke of Monmouth came attended by a considerable number of gentlemen to the Earl of Macclesfield's house at Gawsworth, and that the company 'called upon ye rabble to shout.' The following day, Saturday the 16th, there was buck-shooting in Lord Macclesfield's park, followed by a great banquet, and some sweetmeats were received by one of the witnesses, distributed to him and to others by the Earl's own hand. On the same day, 'upon a plaine neare to ye Earl's house a game called a Prison-barr-play was performed by 20 young men,' for which a piece of plate was presented by Lord Macclesfield. There were afterwards given five guineas 'for making the Duke that sport,' another guinea being presented to two kettle-drummers of the Earl's who had assisted on this occasion. Four thousand people were supposed to have been present, and when the Duke came into the field to see the sport, 'there seemed to bee great satisfaccion to ye Crowd in his presence, which ye multitude expressed by shouting.'"



Gawsworth Old Hall, 1890.



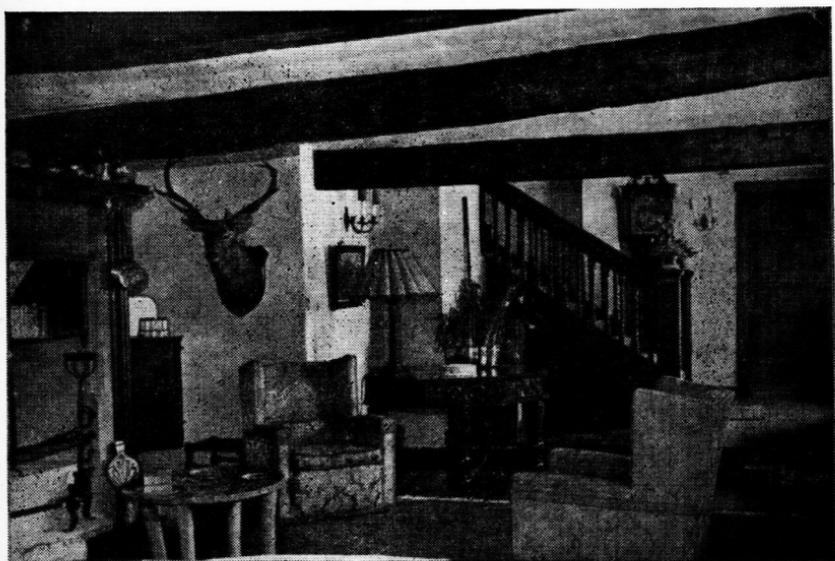
Gawsworth Old Hall when used as a farmhouse, circa 1875.



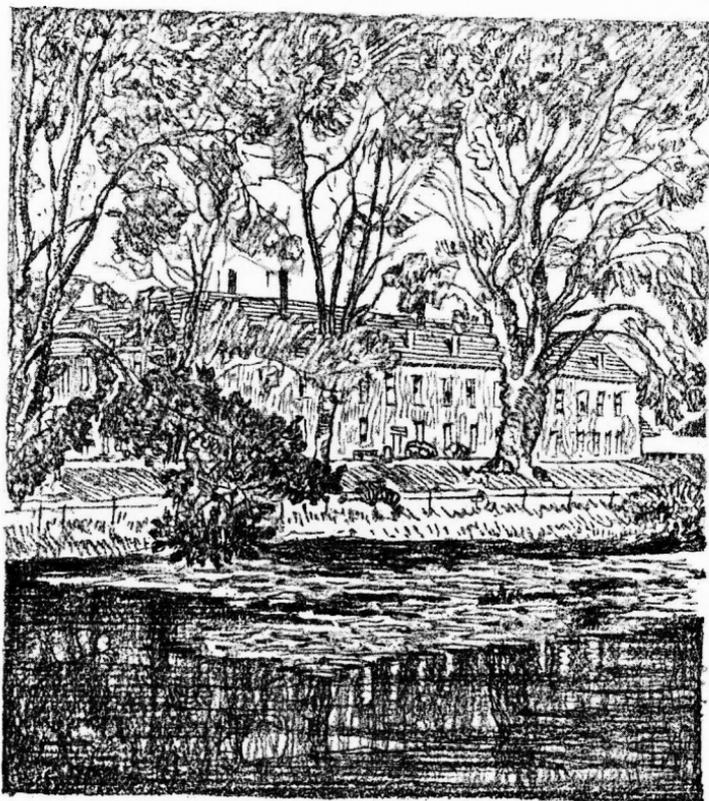
Gawsworth Old Hall from the West.



Gawsworth Old Hall, the North Wing.



Gawsworth Old Hall. The Inner Hall leading to the Dining Room.



The New Hall, built by Lord Mohun, 1707.

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Legh of Lyme with two other justices examined Edward Sherman, Inn-keeper of Gawsworth, and obtained from him much damning evidence. Indeed the Earl of Macclesfield for some months afterwards was in danger of losing his own life, as a result of the hospitality extended to the Duke of Monmouth at Gawsworth.

Until early this century THE NEW HALL was known as the New Buildings. The house was erected early in the eighteenth century by Lord Mohun, but the building was not completed as a result of his tragic death, following the duel fought with the Duke of Hamilton in 1712. Doubtless it was the original intention of Lord Mohun to have built the hall in the form of a quadrangle.

Speaking of the house as it appeared in 1819, Mrs. Brandt says:

“That which stands now is three sides of a large square, and on the fourth side, which is distinct, there are immense buildings such as stables, &c., now used by the farmer who has part of the house. The gamekeeper and his wife also live in a part of the house and take care of a few rooms which the steward occupies when he comes to receive the rents. No superior(!) person seems ever to have lived there for ages before, and the place has the appearance of neglect and ruin.”

In the year 1850 the Earl of Harrington again made the house habitable, and members of the family resided there occasionally until the house was let in 1886 to Mr. W. T. Birchenough, of Macclesfield, who with his family lived there until 1913. Mr. Birchenough made many improvements to the property, and in his day the long drawing room was situated immediately over the stables. His daughter Mrs. Helen Armitage told me that for a number of years a short cut to the coach house was by means of a trap door and pole from the floor above.

In 1913 the house was acquired by Captain R. G. Peel, and the east wing, occupied by Mr. T. W. Clayton who farmed the New Hall farm, once again became part of the main building. Although Captain Peel and his family never came into residence at the Hall he restored the property at great expense, and his architect, Sir Hubert Worthington, of Alderley Edge, designed the existing main entrance and elaborate doorway to the Hall.

The house was eventually sold to Mr. Sidebottom of Chester, who in turn disposed of it to Mr. Hampton Beckett. Within a short period the property was again sold, the purchaser being Mr. John Adshead of Macclesfield, who lived there until his death.

After serving as a convalescent home for a short period, the house in 1947 was bought by the Chester County Council as a home for old

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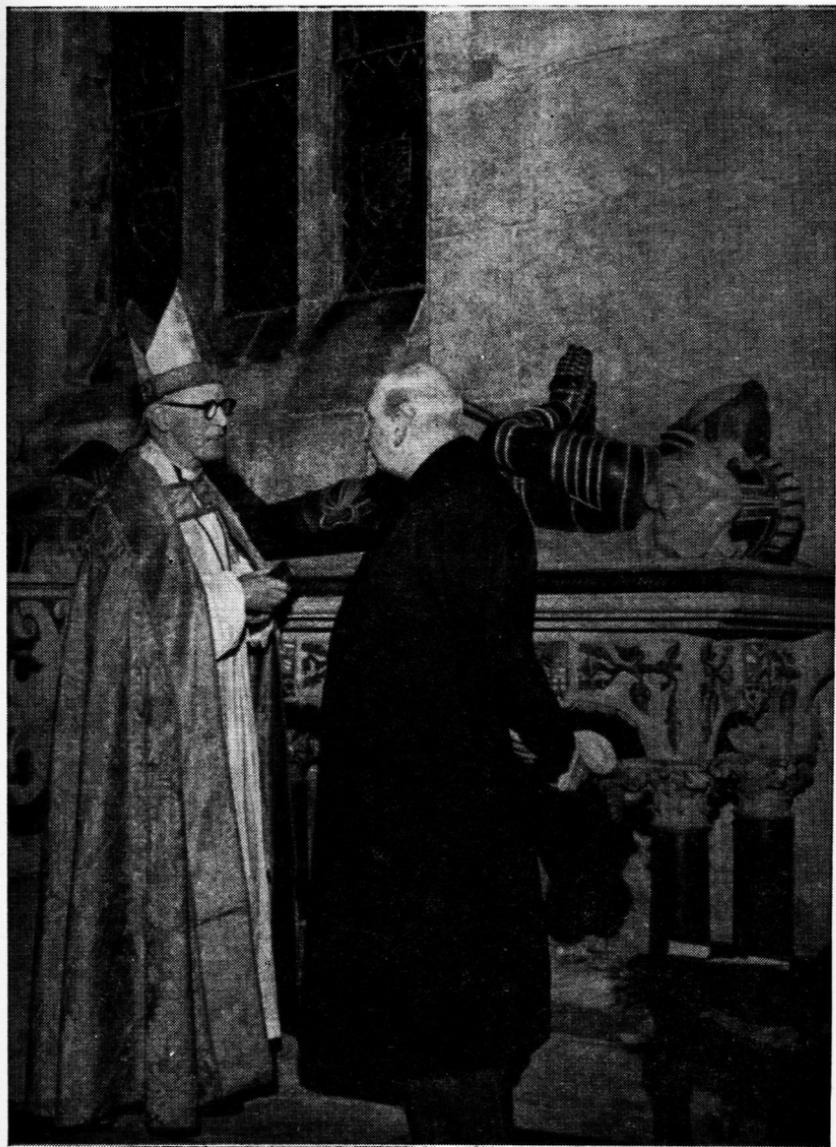
people. In this capacity it provides accommodation for about fifty people, who spend their declining years in a lovely setting of peace and tranquility.

As a building the house is without architectural distinction, and the interior has been so changed by a succession of occupants that little of the original structure survives. Perhaps the finest feature is the massive oak roof, covered with heavy grey stone flags, which survives unchanged from the time of its construction in 1712, the false roof disclosing the framework of massive timbers erected by the carpenters of that period.

Successive sales have removed much of the old furniture and pictures which originally formed part of the furnishings of the house, and although the New Hall has recently been adapted to serve a democratic age, most of its early eighteenth century personality has inevitably been lost in the process.



The Old Rectory, circa 1800.



The Bishop of Chester, Dr. Crick, and the Author, Raymond Richards, at the Service of Thanksgiving on New Year's Day, 1955, following the restoration of the Fitton Monuments.



Mary Fitton, Maid of Honour to Queen Elizabeth I. from the portrait in the collection of H. FitzRoy Newdegate, Esquire, Arbury Hall, Warwickshire.