

LITTLE WENHAM HALL.

POINTED or Mediæval architecture is intimately associated in our thoughts with cathedral, collegiate, and parochial churches. These are the grand exemplars of the style, and with the details of these we must be familiar before we can pretend to any knowledge on the subject. But it must be obvious to every one that architectural embellishment could not be confined to ecclesiastical edifices; but must be in request among the noble and wealthy of the land for the decoration of their own residences. It must be remembered that but one style of architecture prevailed throughout the land at the same period of time. No variation from this rule is discoverable in any of our antient churches; besides, the monastic buildings adapted for the accommodation of the officials of each church, were, necessarily, very much of a domestic character, and if not in accordance with our ideas of a private mansion, yet certainly are not very different from those which were deemed necessary by the territorial lords of the middle ages. Accordingly we find the same principles of architecture carried out in the domestic as well as in the ecclesiastical edifices of those times. The Norman castle and the Norman church present the same features of decoration. This is also true of the Early English, the Decorated, and the Perpendicular styles. The examples, however, of domestic architecture are, as could not be otherwise expected, comparatively very rare; but the houses still in existence are proofs of the rule. Little Wenham Hall is a notable example. There is not an architectural detail which is not equally applicable to a church. The doors, the windows, and the groined roof—even the

very mouldings and bosses, are similar to those which we find in churches of the same period. We need not go far to illustrate this point. The adjacent church presents precisely the same architectural embellishment; indeed, there seems every reason to believe that the church and hall were built at the same time and by the same masons.

Of the period when the hall was built we know nothing but what we can infer from the style of its architecture. In the year 1281 the manors of Great and Little Wenham were held by a family named Holbrooke. It is probable that one of these erected this hall a few years before his death. About two centuries later we find the manors in the possession of Sir Robert Brewse, who was elected a representative for Suffolk in the year 1476. There are several monuments of this family in the church, the last of whom appears to have died in Ipswich in the year 1785.

The hall underwent some repairs, but no material alterations, at the hands of the Brewses. It remains now comparatively unchanged since its first erection, and is, perhaps, the most perfect specimen of an house of the 13th century now existing. Its plan is simple, and the number of the rooms small. It is very substantially built, and adapted for defence against an enemy. Perhaps we shall not be wrong if we regard this hall as the first step in the progress which ultimately led from the feudal castle to the mansion of the present day. At the time of its erection the country was still unsettled, and licenses to fortify houses were frequently granted; and though we miss many of the usual appliances for defence, the thickness and strength of the walls, and the narrow apertures for light in the chamber on the ground floor, show that a forcible entrance was not easily practicable.

The ground plan of the house is a parallelogram, to which is attached on the east side a square, the north walls of each being in the same straight line; in the recess thus formed on the south is a small square. The main building consists of two rooms, that on the east rises a story higher, and in the angle is a turret for a staircase. The lower room has a groined roof of plain character, and communicates with an apartment in the eastern building by a handsome

arched doorway. The former was most likely a depository for stores, and might be used for the assembling of retainers or tenants; the latter seems to have been a repository for more valuable effects. There is an entrance on the south side, coeval with the building, but now blocked up, and on the western side a doorway has subsequently been made, over which is a scroll with this inscription: "CECY FAIT A LAIDE DE DIEU LAN DE GRACE 1569. R. B." The letters point to one of the family of Brewse. No traces of a fire-place are to be discovered. The communication with the upper room was through the small apartment by a staircase in the turret. This upper room was approached from the exterior by a staircase, now destroyed, which appears to have curved round the south-west angle towards the doorway, now accessible by a ladder. There is another doorway in the western wall of much later date, possibly communicating with a building added by a Brewse. On the jamb may be seen the date, 1584, slightly incised, having a cross-crosslet, one of the distinctions of the armorial bearings of Brewse, dividing the figures, and underneath the significant word "vale." The cross-crosslet seems to have been a favourite device of the family, and it appears by itself upon the panels of the monument of Sir Robert Brewse, in Little Wenham church, who died in the year 1585. There seems reason to suppose that there was a new building attached to the hall, a new entrance being provided, and the former doorway and staircase disused. This upper room was the principal apartment. It has a fire-place, now blocked up, which appears to be of the same date as the roof, which is undoubtedly of the 16th century, and was one of the repairs made by the Brewse family. The room is lighted by four windows of two lights each, having a foliated circle for tracery. Nothing in the masonry indicates that these were glazed with glass, and the use of this article was not established in private residences for many years after. Possibly the inclemency of the weather was excluded by drapery; wooden shutters were certainly used, as the staples remain to this day. Each of the windows has a seat in it, perhaps as much for ornament as use. An elegant niche has been made in the south wall of much

later date than the original building: its use is not very apparent, but the iron screw which is appended to it shows that utility was its object. The chapel, which is immediately above the small store-room, is entered by a doorway of remarkable elegance placed between two arched openings, each divided by an octagonal shaft. No glazing was used, and the original shutters remain. The chapel has a groined roof, with excellent mouldings; the ribs meet in a boss at the centre, on which is carved, within a vesica, a figure in the act of blessing. The eastern window is of three lights, with three foliated circles for tracery; the north and south windows are simple lancets, in one of which the original shutter is still left. There is a handsome piscina in the south wall, and an aumbry, or locker, in the north. The north side also has one of those curious side windows of which much has been conjectured, and nothing established. As a confessional it is inapplicable from its height from the ground on the outside, and the supposition that it was designed for ventilation, is equally untenable, for ventilation could not be wanted where other windows were unglazed. A door from the chapel leads into the turret staircase, which conducts to an upper apartment. This was, probably, the private room of the proprietor, and was lighted by three windows, now much defaced, but which were each divided by a mullion. It will thus be understood that this room was only approached through the small store-room, or the chapel, and thus the owner could completely isolate himself from the rest of the household. The accommodation of the house was certainly very limited, but not more so than that of other residences of the same age.

The kitchens and offices were, probably, detached buildings, and, as usual in those times, of wood, or otherwise not very substantially made. Of these no traces are in existence, but perhaps foundations remain.

The exterior of the hall suggests, as I have mentioned, the idea that it was intended as a place of defence. The battlements and loopholes convey the same notion, and the superior height of the turret may lead us to conjecture that it might be used as a watch-tower. Of external defences there are none; the moat appears rather as a boundary line

to the garden or precinct, for the ground rises on the eastern and northern sides, and no traces of a wall are discernible.

It remains only to mention the materials of which the building is composed. These are principally flint and brick, with free-stone dressings for the quoins and buttresses. There are a few layers of the stone called septaria, peculiar to this locality, and now extensively used in the manufacture of cement, but the principal material is brick. Common as is the use of brick in the present day, and its having been also abundantly used by the Romans during their sojourn in Britain, we may wonder that so valuable a material, in a county where free-stone is not easily procurable, should ever have been disused. But the natives of Britain under the Roman dominion were not a very intelligent race of men, and the art was probably soon forgotten after the departure of their masters. Bricks were used in the Saxon and Norman times, but they were fetched from Roman buildings, as was certainly the case at St. Alban's and at Colchester. That they were manufactured during the 14th century we may believe, as we find various specimens in our churches, particularly in the arches of windows. We have good examples of early brickwork in the church of the adjacent parish of Capel; the towers of Lavenham and Stoke-by-Nayland, but more particularly the ruins of St. Olave's Priory, near Beccles, supply us with later examples. Little Wenham Hall, however, is the earliest instance known of bricks manufactured in the present form, which is Flemish and not Roman. They may possibly have been imported from the Low Countries by way of Ipswich, being a cheaper material than stone, which had to be brought by land carriage from a considerable distance. The moulded bricks in the battlements are evidently of a much later date, as is also much of the brickwork in the upper part.

It has been observed that the style of architecture in which the hall is built is precisely similar to that of the church. This building is to the Early English style what Washbrook church is to the Decorated, and, singularly enough, each church has only been altered by the insertion of a single Perpendicular window. Its three doors, the buttresses, and the east window are very good specimens of

the architectural details of the 13th century. There are many monuments of the Brewse family, for I conjecture that the handsome altar-tomb and canopy on the south side may have been the memorial of the Sir Robert Brewse who represented the county in conjunction with Sir John Howard. A brass in the chancel to a member of this family is in good preservation, and a late perpendicular canopied tomb on the north wall has the armorial bearings of the family conspicuously displayed. In the recess is a modern tablet to the memory of Col. Brewse, who died in Ipswich in the year 1785. A Renaissance monument, a good specimen of the style, contains a kneeling figure of Sir Robert Brewse, clad in complete armour. This church well deserves an attentive examination. STEPHEN JACKSON.

* * Owing to the lamented death of Mr. Stephen Jackson, the illustrations that were intended to have accompanied this paper have not been prepared; but very good and accurate plans, views, and details of windows, doors, copings, &c. of Wenham Hall, will be found in the first vol. of T. Hudson Turner's "Architecture of the Middle Ages," page 151.

BURY ABBEY SEAL.

THE seal here engraved was found by me in a farm-house called Alpheton Hall, in the parish of Alpheton, in the county of Suffolk. The farm was then occupied by Mr. Samuel Death, since deceased, and it had long been in the tenure of his family. I could not learn how it came there, but Mr. Death believed that his ancestors had held lands under Bury Abbey. The name of Death, which is of common occurrence in Suffolk and Essex, I believe to be a corruption of D'Aeth. The seal was not attached to any deed.

An impression of this seal is in the British Museum, appendant to a deed of 9 Henry VIII., and there is or was another impression in the Augmentation Office, from which an engraving was made for Dugdale's *Monasticon*, vol. iii., plate xvii.