



CLEVEDON COURT, SOMERSET.

Etched by W. Rudgood.
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PAPERS, ETC.

Clevedon Court.

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LET us suppose ourselves to be standing in front of Clevedon Court. It is not difficult to grasp its character. Some one has described a Cathedral as a "frozen poem." The same idea would apply to Clevedon Court, only "frozen" sounds too cold a word. The Court, like many other old mansions, has, as it were, grown of itself. It has been enlarged, and it has been ill-used; it has been, in short, considerably knocked about, and yet it has taken all quietly and pleasantly. It gathers up all reasonable additions; and cold and grim as they may at first appear, time does wonders, and what threatened to do hurt, ends in bringing a new development of beauty. Just let us glance at the front elevation; it is well known to many. The two Elizabethan gables on the west; the old Tower or Turret next to those gables; the projecting rooms, in the upper one of which you can see the tracery of the square window; the broad recess overlooked by the Hall window; the Entrance

Porch; the beautiful Elizabethan gable adjoining; then the old Kitchen, covered with the pomegranate. The last was evidently placed at a moderate angle from the Elizabethan gable, in order that the inmates might keep watch, when necessary, over the Entrance Porch. Somewhat to the rear of the Kitchen there stands out a strongly-built and weather beaten Tower, facing to south and east. The Elizabethan gables which I have mentioned are ornamented with faces cut in stone. I do not pretend to explain those on the two gables towards the west end of the front. One of them appears to be meant for a savage. But in the gable between the Porch and the Kitchen, I would suggest that the female figure with a conspicuous ruff is intended to represent Queen Elizabeth. On the summit of this gable there is seated a bear, cut in stone, with, as I believe, remains of the ragged staff—one of the well known crests of the Earls of Warwick. I find in copies of documents obtained from the British Museum some years ago, that in the 38th year of Henry VI, Thomas Wake held at his death the Manor of Clevedon, of Richard, Earl of Warwick. Generally, I find the Wakes under the Honour of Gloucester; but the above reference shows that there was, or had been, some connection between the manor and the Earls of Warwick.

We now enter the Court through the Entrance Porch. Here you must take notice of the old grooves for the portcullis on each side of the doorway. On the right, close to the fine 14th century doorway, you can ascend the Tower or Turret, by means of the steep old stone steps. You will bear in mind that there are four turrets; three of them at or near the old projecting Porches of the Court; the fourth has suffered from changes difficult to identify. At the top of the stairs you can step out on the lead roof, from whence you obtain a far off view of the Mendips and intervening lands, and below, the gardens of the Court. On the left there is a fine Spanish chestnut; whilst a Scotch fir that has suffered from the gales and a grand Plane tree, like veteran soldiers keep guard over the gate of

entrance to the grounds. The *Taxodium*, the graceful *Excelsa*, and the *Pinus Insignis* with its rich green foliage, and two ancient mulberry trees, point the way to the wide-spreading lofty elm near the end of the west lawn. The four Towers to which I referred were, of course, originally much more prominent to the eye in the ancient days, before the large extension of the Court House by the Wakes, and, I must add, the mild intrusion of roses, myrtles, and evergreen shrubs, threw them somewhat into the back ground. We have, however, lately laid open many parts of the south front, which were hidden from view by the indefatigable ivy and waving branches of laurel. I remember, some time ago, discovering that the ivy, with great impropriety, had effected an entrance into the inside of the Porch, and was apparently making up its mind to take entire possession of it.

You now descend, and enter the 14th century doorway, fronting the Porch, and will notice on the right the three doorways which stamp the date of this part of the Court. On the left is the entrance into the Great Hall, screened off by a thin wall. Turning into the first of these doorways, there is a small room, called the Justice Room. Part of the walls of this room must be as old as the doorway leading into it. The picturesque Elizabethan gable front, facing the south, was the work of the Wakes, but I should suppose that some building must have previously connected the entrance doorway of the Justice Room with the Kitchen or other offices. The centre and largest of the three doorways was originally the main entrance to the offices, but is now the approach to an oak staircase leading to the "Minstrel Gallery," which looks into the Great Hall. The third doorway is the one that communicates with the offices, including the Kitchen and bedroom over. In passing to the Kitchen you cross a triangular space, over which is a large skylight. This space was formerly open to the air, and I believe was used, when occasion required, as a brewhouse. The present Kitchen—though lofty, and tolerably spacious—is

only a part of the original one. In the first place, the ancient Kitchen reached from the ground to the roof; whereas its height has been now reduced by the introduction of servants' bedrooms into the upper part. Again, the old Kitchen extended from the front, looking south-west, to the massive wall on the north side of the present housekeeper's room. Over this room there are also two stories of bedrooms for servants, so that the height of the room named is much below that of the present Kitchen. An old doorway, of a similar character to the three doorways, only less ornate, led in the olden time at once into the great Kitchen of mediæval days. To understand what that Kitchen really was, you must imagine the whole of the modern ceilings, joists, rafters, manifold partitions and staircases to be swept clean away, and the high-pitched roof of the Kitchen laid bare from south to north, and west to east. Some years ago we had the satisfaction of removing an awkward and unsightly deal staircase from its position within the original site of the Kitchen, and putting an oak staircase instead of it, outside of the old wall.

I would, in passing, suggest a glance at the now closed up doorway of the Scullery. The windows of this Scullery, looking into the triangular space, are Elizabethan; but one would like to know whether the door, referred to above, may not be of an earlier date.

Returning to the three doorways opposite the screen, you can mount the oak staircase on the left, and enter the Minstrels' Gallery, from whence the Great Hall is seen to good effect. The Porch room is at the south end of the gallery. The two-light window in this room has, some time or other, been injured, and not well repaired. Looking at it from the outside, there are some indications that this window was originally one of the De Clevedon period, with an arch over it. Yet it would seem that such a window over the main entrance, and in the chamber where the Portcullis was lowered or drawn up, would have been unsuitable. Buckler, in his engraving of Clevedon

Court in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1834, boldly makes this window, as shown in his sketch, a Decorated arched window. But, unfortunately for Buckler, there exists in what is called the Brown Hall, an oil painting, of about the time of Queen Anne. In this painting the Porch room window over the entrance door is clearly represented, and this window has no arch, but a plain, square head. The corresponding window in the north Porch room at the back of the Court is Elizabethan. This room communicates, by a flight of stone steps, with the Entrance Porch at the back of the Court. The stone steps formed part of the second Tower of the Court, but the upper part of the Tower has at some time or other been taken down. The steps do not ascend higher than the level of the north Porch room, but they are more in use than any of the steps in the other Towers. Looking out from the windows at the back, the view, especially in summer time, is charming. The gentle slopes of the garden, bright with flowers, lead up to successive terraces, with roses, clematis, escallonias, ceanothus, passion flowers, and other climbing plants; whilst directly above, the waving woods rise higher and higher to the summit of the hill, which, not long ago, was little better than a "sheep run."

It is now time to descend to the Great Hall. This Hall has suffered somewhat in the same way as the Kitchen. A flat roof, comparatively modern, has stunted its beauty. The space above the ceilings is however unoccupied, except, I must confess, by bats, harmless at all times unless you have the temerity to venture into their airy home with a lighted candle. Of course there is a natural desire to throw open the Hall to the roof, but it is feared we might, when too late, regret the change from a warm room to a cold one. At each gable, above the flat ceiling, there are two interesting windows of a kind which I should suppose may be unusual. They carry us back to the time when chimneys were scarce, and smoke abundant. You will observe, however, in the arch of

these ancient windows, apertures by means of which the smoke was tempted to escape into chimneys or flues which, after 400 years, still stand at the gable ends of the roof of the Hall. I may add that there are unmistakeable marks of smoke in the opening connected with the flues above. One feels some doubt whether the old Hall was altogether saved from the nuisance of smoke, especially in stormy weather, but in favourable times the smoke certainly might rise into the higher regions and find its way out. The fire place in those days was of course in or near the middle of the Hall. The windows below the present ceiling would have been narrow apertures; those now in the Hall belong to the Elizabethan period. Touching, however, the large arch over the window in the south, I must admit that this was not an idea of the Wakes, but of my grandfather, the Rev. Sir Abraham Elton. It was deemed a great advantage in point of light, and, I think, in the opinion of Sir Abraham, in respect also of architectural beauty. But I remember a friend kindly consoling me by saying that "there was not much harm done," or words to that effect. I ought to add that there is a window looking into the Hall from the "Lady's Bower," which is a genuine 14th century window. The room at the south-west angle of the Hall closely corresponds with the front Entrance Porch, and jutting out boldly beyond the Hall, with the ancient Decorated window above it, contributes greatly to the beauty of the south elevation of the Court.

Over the doorway leading to this room, now an Oratory, you can detect the form of the 14th century arch, which certainly ought to be restored. Returning to the Hall another doorway is opposite to you. This is a doorway also of the time of the De Clevedons, and close to it on your left hand there is a richly carved Elizabethan doorway of stone, painted a dark oak colour. Going through this doorway you find yourself in a good-sized passage, leading to the west front of the Court. It has an oak floor, and, like the Hall, is wainscoted with oak

panels on each wall. On the left hand is the doorway into the Library, which, however, I believe was in the first instance used as a dining room. The stone doorway, through which you enter this interesting room, was laid open a few years ago; it had been covered up by plaster and wainscoting. Some seem to speak of this room as if it had been entirely built by the Wakes, but although the Elizabethan window, the mantel-piece, the doorway, and some other needful work, was their doing, I believe that buildings must have existed here as far back as the time of the Edwards, when the "Lady's Bower" was first constructed. The only ingress and egress to and from the Lady's Bower must have been through the room called the Red Room, exactly above the Library, and of course this involves a roof over it. The Red Room was the Solar or Lord's Chamber. As for the room under, probably it might have been used as a cellar or store house. In 1872 I ventured to undertake the serious task of shifting all my books in the Library, and also all the shelves, in order to fix new book-cases. I found the walls behind the bookcases were wainscoted about five feet high, but the old walls behind and above the wainscot were very rough. Whilst making my researches in the empty room I came upon a small window which looked into the oak passage outside. It had been plastered up. It was a window with a square head of Bath stone, and jambs and sill of the same material. It did not appear to have been long in use, but we could gain no information on the subject. The oldest man in my employ said he remembered the Library having been used as dining room, but as for the window he had never seen nor heard of it. Judging from the fresh look of the freestone, the Wakes could not have used the window long, but must from some reason or other have closed it up. I placed stained glass in it, with the portrait of one of the best men of the Elizabethan age, Sir Philip Sidney, whose introduction will I am sure not be displeasing to the shade of Sir John Wake.

The Library mantel-piece well repays attention. The Wake knot circles along the frieze, from one side of the centre-piece to the other; above are the arms and initials of I.W., *i.e.*, John Wake. There are various figures and curious devices. Again in the Elizabethan window at the end of the room, in the two centre panes above the transom, there are two lozenge-shaped insertions; one with the Wake knot, and underneath, the date 1570; the other contains the Wake motto, "Wake and Pray."

On Sir Charles Elton coming to reside here there was no communication between the Library and the present Oratory on the one side, and the Drawing Room on the other. It was considered a work of some danger to excavate as it were the interposing walls. The width of the wall into the Oratory is four feet, and that of the wall into the Drawing Room four feet six inches. The work was however safely executed. I once made a cautious attempt to ascertain if there was an opening into the Tower which stands at the corner of the present Oratory. We made some way, but found no sign of any recent work, and were rather glad to let it alone. The mortar in the wall had mouldered away into sand.

The Drawing Room possesses a very good Elizabethan window, looking south, which together with the window in the room over, was entirely blocked up when we came here. There is a legend that many years ago the room was so little appreciated that a pony was allowed to use it as a stable, and make himself comfortable there. I may safely dismiss this story as a libel both on my predecessors as well as on the pony. The mantel-piece in the Drawing Room is well designed and gracefully executed. It was probably placed there in the reign of William and Mary, by John, 3rd Earl of Bristol, to whom the Mansion and Manor of Clevedon had passed, from the Wakes, whose generous sacrifices in aid of the cause of Charles I, had greatly reduced their income. It may be well to add that the Earl of Bristol died on September 18, 1698,

having in his will given directions to his wife, the Lady Rachel, to sell the whole of the Clevedon estate, which directions were accordingly carried out. In 1709 Mr. Abraham Elton [afterwards Sir Abraham Elton, Bart.], a wealthy merchant of Bristol, purchased the estate, and added to it other land.

We have now reached the west end of the Court, and I must say a few words as to the history of this part of the building. In the old oil picture, already mentioned, the west elevation is very slightly shown, but the character of the windows must have corresponded with those of the style of Queen Anne in the north front of the Court, now reduced in number to only two or three. Sometime, however, about the year 1767, Sir Abraham Isaac Elton, the fourth baronet, dissatisfied with the simplicity of the west front, finally resolved to pull it down, and put up another which should harmonize better with the ancient portions of the Court. Sir Abraham accordingly set to work, and after pulling down the old front, built up a façade which was chiefly remarkable for lilliputian battlements, and windows awkward to open, surmounted by ogee arches of a feeble type.

Sir Abraham Isaac Elton was a man of known ability and sound discretion; but it would have taxed even wiser heads than his to construct a west front suitable for the taste of the period, and yet possessing a faint flavour of mediæval times. Sir Abraham Isaac therefore failed; but as he was never himself conscious of it, his peace of mind was not disturbed.

With the careful assistance of Mr. Charles Davis, of Bath, in the year 1862, a large portion of the west front was removed, and the whole of it either rebuilt or altered. The object of Mr. Davis and myself was to avoid anything like an attempt to vie with the old mansion. The Dining Room, which is opposite the Drawing Room, has undergone several alterations, from time to time.

There are mysterious stories of human bones found in the gardens, and perhaps our excellent President may kindly

throw the exciting circumstances into a tale, for the benefit of the next Archæological Meeting.

Proceeding up stairs, we reach the Red Room, and from thence enter the Lady's Bower. You can here examine the beautiful flowing tracery of the square-headed window of the Decorated period, looking over the front gardens. The small two-light window, with decorated arch opposite has been already noticed. It was rescued from oblivion a good while ago, if I am not mistaken, by Lady Elton, the wife of the Rev. Sir Abraham Elton. We have put stained glass into it, and the grand riticulated window calls for the same dutiful attention, which we hope may not be long delayed. From this small window it is pleasant to look down upon the Hall. Here "the Lady" of old from time to time cautiously watched the maidens at work beneath, or took note of any unwelcome or forbidden visitor. On the right of the square window there is a strong door, which leads by the stone steps from the Lady's Bower to the lead roof above. The ceiling of this room is covered with old oak; probably similar to that which once gave additional beauty to the roof of the Hall.

This is the third Tower we have seen. On returning through the Red Room to the passage, there is a comfortable room opposite, called the Oak Room. It has the reputation of being haunted. The ghost is said to be a cobbler; not at all an interesting visitant. The room over the Oak Room is a small one, and the entrance to it is built up. We do not intend to open it, as it is possible we might find nothing there; and the cobbler might be affronted, and leave the Court destitute even of the ghost of a cobbler.

At the end of the same passage there is another flight of stone steps leading to a small room above. It formed part of the fourth Tower, but has been a good deal injured. You must now turn down some steps, where looking back you will see a doorway of the De Clevedon period. This doorway has an interest. It was long hidden from sight, like other treasures

of the same period, but was discovered at last, and when discovered it was found that there were remains of ivy clinging to the outer side. I believe, therefore, that the doorway led to stairs, now removed, which were open to the sky as was common in mediæval times, and that this staircase partly occupied the site of the present Queen Anne staircase.

Down this staircase of Anne, which still possesses a window of about the same date, you can descend into the Hall, and rest yourself after what, I fear, may have been a somewhat tedious perambulation.
