

Barrington Court

BY J. EDWIN FORBES, F.R.I.B.A.

[This paper represents what was said by Mr. Forbes on the spot when the Society visited the place in July, 1925. See Part I.]

AN account of what has been done to Barrington Court during the years 1920—1925, and what we have learnt in the doing of it, will, I feel sure, be of interest. The restoration has been done at the wish of Colonel Lyle, under the supervision of the National Trust, as advised by the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings.

It has been the aim of us all to repair what was decayed, to replace what had been taken away, to shew again the original aspect and elevations of the building, and to make it safe for many generations yet to be. The result is now apparent, but very few could guess at how great a cost. It has been to Colonel Lyle a labour of love, and expense has not been stinted.

In my opinion the ground plan and the lower part of the Court house belong to the first quarter of the XVI Century, and if I must name a year it will be 1518. I had formed this opinion before Prebendary Hamlet told me that the manor which had been confiscated in the Wars of the Roses was recovered by the Daubeney's in 1514.

Up to the wall-plate of the main roof the work was carried on in a purely English style, but above this we have clear evidence of the French influence which pervaded the country after 1520, the year of the Field of the Cloth of Gold. In this connection I call attention to the gables, the finials, the chimney-stacks and the lavabo near the main entrance on the

south. The scales on the finials are a common decoration on French chateaux of the middle of the XVI Century, and were copied from the heraldic beast in the arms of Francis I. But the finials end, after all, in a cluster of English crockets. The blending of the two styles is wonderfully harmonised, and shews a great feeling for architectural composition. Originally there were six other gables the evidence for which was quite clear when we uncovered the roof, and may be discovered when looked for even from the ground. Four were on the s. front, and two on the e. Perhaps they were blown down in the Great Storm of 1703 when, according to Defoe, the park lost eight score trees.¹ C. J. Richardson perceived that there had been other gables, as can be seen from his plate dated 1841 in Nash's *Mansions*. By the way, we found wall foundations along the line of the balustrade shewn in this plate, at the s.w. corner of the house.

I think the roof was not completed by the original architect, and that the building may have stood unfinished for as long as fifty years.

When this house was planned and begun there was no longer any need to provide defensive works for dwelling-places. But the earlier house had a moat of which the older inhabitants still speak, and also a gate-house. A fragment of XV Century window tracery was found in the upper corridor before I came, and under the Great Hall and the e. wing we found parts of a XIV Century stone screen. These fragments have been carefully preserved.

Before passing to later additions and alterations I may refer to far earlier days. In the bank on the s. side of Aller Grove not far away is a spring called "Silver Well," which now supplies the water-court of the Strode block and the lavabo at the s. entrance of the Court. Near the well, excavations made in 1913 and 1921 (*Proceedings*, LIX, ii, 82) yielded abundant specimens of Romano-British pottery and the skeleton of a woman. Probably this area would repay further examination.

1. "At Barrington, about 2 miles north of this town [Ilminster], there was blown down above eight score trees, being of an extraordinary height, at the Lady Stroude's."—"The Storm," Nov. 26-27, 1703. Defoe's Works, Vol. V, 322, Bohn edn.

In the s.w. corner of the orchard E. of the Court we found bricks and tiles of (say) Norman date, and beneath the N.E. corner of the house we found footings of walling which appeared to me to be of about 1300.

The present house received substantial additions and alterations in the third quarter of the XVI Century, and in the first and third quarters of the XVII Century.

The s. porch was added somewhere about 1560. It is not bonded to the main building, and on its w. side there is a Renaissance moulding at the base of the chimney-stack; beneath which are many masons' marks. The porch gives me the impression that the builder was harking back to make his addition in the style of the earlier work. At the same time the roof was timbered and covered with small grey-green slates. One would have expected at that period 'stone slates,' but the position of the rafters shewed that they were intended to receive slates. A very large number of these slates, broken, was found in levelling around the house. Maybe they^s were blown off in the Great Storm. Slates of this type were used on the Strode block about 1670, and have now been re-used on the farm-house at the w. end of the range of new buildings to the N.W. I have not met with this kind of slate elsewhere. Those on the Court in 1920 were purple and much larger.

Early in the XVII Century many lesser alterations and additions were made by the first William Strode of Barrington. To him we may attribute the pendentive arch at the head of the steps which carry the passage over the Great Hall; the plaster Judgment of Solomon, and the fine chimney-piece bearing the Strode coat-of-arms, flanked by those of himself and of his wife Joan Barnard, in the upper room of the E. wing.

The stone shield, Strode impaling Barnard, now over the doorway to the ground floor room of this wing, was sent to the Vicar from Glastonbury about twenty years ago by Mr. Swayne.

Later in the same century, about 1670, the second William Strode, who built the neighbouring brick block, laid somewhat vandalistic hands upon the Court house. Beautiful Tudor doorways and fine fire-places were ill-treated; and much of the early panelling and the stone staircases in the two projecting oriels were removed. Some of the panelling which he

set up in the Great Hall and elsewhere, and the wooden staircase of the s.w. oriel were infested with dry-rot and could not be retained. But some of his panelling may be seen in the n.w. bedroom and in a room over the s. porch. The older panelling of the n.e. bedroom was removed and sold by the man who owned the house for a few years before Miss Woodward bought the place and transferred it to the National Trust.

The long gallery on the second floor runs the whole length of the main axis and of the two wings. Later examples are not uncommon. This is an early instance and not much later than the earliest, in Cardinal Wolsey's Hampton Court.

There are traces of doorways on both sides of the e. wing, and in the e. front of the w. wing. These may have given access to "lodgings" as they were called; similar doorways may be seen in the later house at Kirby Hall in Northants. On the w. side of the w. wing we have closed an early doorway, shewn in Richardson's plate. To this a XIX Century owner had added a porch, and another owner, a little earlier, had placed a deal staircase in this wing.

By leaving the built-up doorways unopened, by removing the bricks blocking the windows from the time of the window-tax, by the restoration of lintels, mullions, and sills which had been destroyed, the appearance and the elevation of this s. front, save that the gables were not rebuilt, are now very much what they were at the end of the XVI Century.

The n. front, by the removal of encroaching surface soil, and of lean-to brick and galvanised-iron erections has its old austerity and dignity restored. A XVII Century doorway has been somewhat widened, and steps provided so that this may be the main approach and entrance.

The neighbouring brick block was built by the second William Strode about 1670. His initials may be seen in flare-end bricks at the n. end of its e. front. It was planned as a quadrangle of three sides, open to the n. Here he had stabling for twelve horses, room for two coaches, a large stable-yard, lodging for his servants, a granary, a brew-house, etc. It was a later owner who after 1760 gave a new appearance to the s. front by the addition of Ham stone to the entrance and the

windows. The w. front has now been pierced by windows and doorways to which have been added Ham stone after the same manner. Between this w. front and the moat was the old garden enclosed by tall brick walls. When Colonel Lyle took possession, the open quad was littered with heaps of farmyard manure. The quadrangle has been now completed by the addition of a fourth side, a water-court has been formed, and the whole block converted internally into a modern house with a passage linking it to the Court.

There is a third building by which we set store; the XVI Century 'buss-stall'¹ to the N. of the Strode block, with its **M** roof. It has twelve divisions each sub-divided, for the cow and the calf. It was supplied with water from the Strode block by a little Ham-stone duct. The Elizabethan woodwork and the roof are of special interest. Here, as yet, nothing has been done beyond careful repair of the roof.

1. *Buss*=a young fattened calf which has never been weaned. *Buss-beef*=flesh of an unweaned calf which has sucked its mother till full grown; tender beef.—*West Somerset Word Book*.