

ART. XVI.—*Calgarth Hall*. By GEORGE AITCHISON.

Read on the site July 6th, 1933.

THE first reference I can find to Calgarth, which originally would be "Calfgarth," is that in 1365; a Commission was appointed to consider complaints in connection with the parks at Troutbeck and Calgarth. It does not, of course, follow that there was necessarily a house at Calgarth at that time.

We also learn that, in 1443, the king granted to Walter Strykland the office of Keeper of the Park at Calgarth for the term of his life.

The earliest reference we can find to Calgarth Hall itself is in the pedigree of the Philipson family. I do not propose to attempt to give you a full account of the Philipson family, but only so far as it affects this property. Robert Philipson, of Hollinghall, married a daughter of one Dockwray, of Dockwray Hall in Kendal, probably in the reign of Henry IV, i.e. early 15th century. In the pedigree this marriage is ascribed to the reign of Henry III, but this is probably a mistake, as the next Philipson in the pedigree did not die until 1517. It is also thought that the termination "son" would not be found before the reign of Henry IV.

I can find no trace as to how the Philipsons acquired Calgarth, and it may or may not have been by marriage. If the suggested date with regard to Robert Philipson is correct, he was followed by Rowland Philipson, also of Hollinghall, who married Katharine, the daughter of Richard Carus, of Astwait, and died, as previously stated, in 1517. He was succeeded by his surviving son, Robert Philipson, of Hollinghall, who married Janet

Layburne. Robert died in 1540, and was followed by his son, Christopher, who married the daughter of Robert Briggs, of Hellsfell Hall. Christopher was receiver to Edward V of his rents in Westmorland, and died in 1566. He left five sons and two daughters. Robert came into the estates and died without issue in 1631. After his death his brother Rowland followed, the second and third sons of Christopher having also died without issue. Rowland married Catharine, daughter of Nicholas Carus, of Kendal. His eldest son married Elizabeth, daughter of Sir Marmaduke Wyvil, of Constable Burton in Yorkshire, who died without issue. Therefore the father was succeeded by his second son, Robert, who married Anne, daughter of Geoffrey Gourley, of London, and had eight children. He was followed by his son Christopher who was married twice, but died without issue. His eldest surviving brother, John, the fifth son of Rowland, succeeded, his wife being Dorothy, daughter of Christopher Crackenthorp, of Newbiggin. In 1652, John's estates were seized by Cromwell's parliament, and he died in 1664, having twelve children. His son and heir, John, succeeded, and he it was who sold the Melsonby estate, the family having suffered very heavily by fines. This John moved into Cumberland and died abroad. His eldest son, John, born in 1665, had four children, all daughters, and they sold Calgarth, probably in 1717, to the Pennys. In 1777 the property was in the possession of William Penny of Penny Bridge Hall for his life, after which it had to go to the heirs of Myles Sandys, of Graythwaite. They sold it to Dr. Richard Watson, afterwards Bishop of Llandaff, and he it was who forsook Calgarth Hall and built Calgarth Park.

There is no doubt that Calgarth Hall was at one time a residence of some importance. Some historians would suggest it was once the equal of Levens Hall and Sizergh Castle, but it is not easy to believe that this equality



ROOM AS PANELLED IN 1900.

TO FACE P. 208.

ever existed. The building was, however, at one time much larger and more important than it is now. It is possible that the centre portion was once the main hall with the principal rooms on the left and the kitchens on the right. Undoubtedly, the property fell into a very bad state of repair after it had been seized by Cromwell's parliament. I suggest that a large portion of it became a ruin, and, at a later date, the house was rebuilt more on its present lines. There is a ground floor plan of the existing building on view in the house, and it is to be noted that, on the far side of the central block, there is a wall 7 ft. 6 ins. thick.

In the centre portion three old oak principals can still be seen, two of these having been cut off at the walls, whilst the third forms part of one of the bedroom divisions. The main interest at the present time is in the rooms on the righthand side. In the downstairs room, now the kitchen, one would be led to believe, from the size of the fireplace, that this was at one time the kitchen of the old house, and was converted about 1635 into one of the private rooms, when the plaster overmantel there to be seen was formed.

In the room above is to be seen a very fine ceiling. The plastering of ceilings began about 1550, and there are good examples of these ceilings at Levens Hall, Bleaze Hall and here. The ceiling at Bleaze Hall was done between 1631 and 1644, and is of superfine elegance. The ceiling at Calgarth is dated about 1638, and it is entirely lacking in grace of line. The late Mr. J. F. Curwen, in writing his article on ceilings in these *Transactions*, says: "Calgarth is faulty by the very freedom of its badness, while Bleaze is by its servile goodness." The room was at one time panelled in oak, and an enlarged photograph of the room when it was so panelled can be seen upstairs. This panelling was removed by Mr. Watson, the previous owner of Calgarth

Park, where he had it fitted in his new billiard room. It was taken out by Mr. Hedley, the present owner, when Calgarth Park was turned into a hospital during the war. A portion of this panelling also is on view in the room to-day.

In looking at this ceiling, it will be observed that it runs into the adjoining bedroom, whereas the photograph shows the panelling as surrounding the present room. It is obvious that the panelling would not fit the room when the ceiling was made, and was removed there later, although its date is probably the same as that of the ceiling.

To revert to the downstairs room, the same form of plastering is seen over the mantel, and displays two very crude armorial shields, one of Christopher Philipson and the other of his wife, Elizabeth Wyvil. Grotesque and venomous serpents support the latter shield, and from the bottom corner a very poor attempt has been made to form a stem of foliage which seems to straggle upwards in a most awkward manner. Both ceiling and over-mantel clearly have been worked in the native parge and by hand without much skill. In the early days, the various devices that enriched the background were nearly always modelled in raw plaster by the thumb and fingers; later, when considerable repetition of the device was needed, they were engraved in wood and "butter pressed" up into the soft background.

In this lower room there are a frieze and two decorated beams suggestive of the latter method, which would lead one to believe that this frieze is of a later date than the overmantel.

On the far wall, over the only two stone windows remaining in the house, there is an elaborate picture of a stag hunt. Above the hounds are to be seen various letters, but what they mean I have not been able to discover. It is possible that opinion may be available on this point.



TO FACE P. 210.

PLASTER CEILING.

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When Mr. Hedley acquired the property in 1912, the overmantel and friezes were so covered up with whitewash that it was almost impossible to see the design. This whitewash has all been carefully taken off and any damaged plaster repaired by hand. In this connection I may say that the tails of some of the hounds in the hunting scene were replaced. A local character looking at the work said that it was easy to see which tails had been recently put on, as these were hanging down, and the old folk had more sense than show a hound hunting with its tail down.

In 1777, there were five coats of arms in the downstairs rooms, but there is only one now in existence. This being cracked, it was taken out in 1912, but it is now restored to its place. This coat of arms came from the left hand bottom pane of the righthand window. It represents the arms of Briggs of Cawmire and elsewhere. Readers will remember that Christopher Philipson, who died in 1556, married Elizabeth, daughter of Robert Briggs, of Helsfell Hall.

I suppose one cannot speak of Calgarth without making some reference to the famous legend of the skulls. The legend runs that one Myles Philipson, a Justice of the Peace, wished to add to his estate a small tenement owned by an old couple called Kraster and Dorothy Cook. The Cooks refused to sell, and, in order to gain possession of the coveted property, Philipson invited them to a Christmas feast at his house. Afterwards he accused them of stealing a silver cup which was said to be missing, and somehow the cup was so found that the Cooks appeared to be the culprits. They were tried and condemned to death. They were hanged at Appleby, but, before her death, Dorothy laid seven curses on Calgarth, and said that, whilst its walls stood, they would haunt it night and day. It is said that from that day forth the skulls have appeared at Calgarth and have

returned there no matter what pains the inhabitants took to be rid of them. They are said to have been burnt, buried and thrown into the lake, but they always re-appeared. It is stated that they have always returned to a small niche at the top of the staircase, but, unfortunately, nothing has been seen of them for many years.

In conclusion, I would like to say how grateful I am to Mr. H. S. Cowper for the assistance he has given me, not only for the information he has supplied, but also for coming down and inspecting the house with me.