

BRABŒUF MANOR

BY

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WITHIN a mile of Guildford High Street, hidden by its sheltering woodlands and miniature park from the eyes of those travelling along the main Portsmouth road, is to be found a picturesque and somewhat unusually interesting example of a manor house that preserves practically unimpaired all the charm and beauty that is to-day so worthily attributed to the domestic architecture of Tudor England.

The history of Brabœuf Manor is the rare record of a property that has remained for over seven hundred years in the possession of one family, passing from each generation to the next by direct inheritance. It is perhaps not unreasonable to think that it is in consequence of this continuity of possession by one family, with traditions to preserve, and of its uninterrupted occupation, that the manor house owes its remarkable preservation, both in respect to its structure and decoration.

The Manor.

Brabœuf Manor originally formed part of that of Artington, which in turn was taken out of the manor of Godalming. Godalming was a possession of Alfred the Great and was held by the Crown when, about the year 1171, the manor of Artington was separated from it and, with £15 a year, granted to Master David of London in reward for his services as an envoy to Rome in connection with the negotiations which followed the murder of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury. Master David granted Artington to Ralph de Broc for the sum of £15 a year in fee farm. On Ralph's death, about 1187, his lands at Artington and elsewhere passed to his son-in-law, Stephen de Thurnham. Stephen belonged to a wealthy family and was himself a man of some note. His father, Robert de Thurnham, about 1160, founded the Augustinian Abbey, afterwards Priory, of Cumbwell in the parish of Goudhurst, Kent. Stephen de Thurnham was, in 1193, chosen to conduct Berengaria, Queen of England, Joanna, Queen of Sicily, and the daughter of the Emperor of Cyprus, on their way from Palestine to Poitou. He brought the three ladies to Rome, where they were received by the Pope and other notable persons and remained for six months



“MANOUR HOUSE OF BRAY-BŒUF NEAR GUILDFORD SURREY.”

Drawing by Moses Griffith, about 1800.

In the possession of Lt.-Col. J. A. C. Younger, formerly in the Thomas Pennant and Earl of Denbigh Collections.

“propter metum Imperatoris.”¹ Stephen de Thurnham died about 1214, leaving five daughters his coheirs between whom his lands were divided. That part of Artington which subsequently formed part or the whole of the manor of Brabœuf fell to his daughter Alice, wife of Adam de Wendeng. In 1232 Alice granted her manor of Artington to Geoffrey de Brabœuf, who appears from reliable evidence to have been her nephew. The grant to Geoffrey was confirmed in a charter dated September 26th, 1251 :—

Inspeximus and confirmation of a charter whereby Alice de Wendeng, daughter of Stephen de Thurnham, in her widowhood, gave to Geoffrey de Braibuf, for his homage and service, all the share of land and rent which fell to her by inheritance in the town of Ertendon, that is a croft called Boywyk, twenty-eight acres of arable land and 26s. of rent in the said town, the fourth part of two mills in Westneye, and all other possessions of all kinds, to be held by the said Geoffrey, his heirs and assigns from the said Alice by rendering yearly 6d. at Easter.

Witnesses, Sir Richard de Dol, William de Wykes, Thomas de Hertmere, Henry de Wintressell, Ridhard de Smalebrede, Walter de Munsted, Roger de Gras, Walter de la Fenne, Richard de Stolleburi, Geogory de la Don, John de Parco, Jordan de Monte, and Jordan de Ettendon. Dated at Hescumb 5 March, A.D. 1232.

*Galfridus de Braibuf solvit in garderoba et quietus est.*²

The manor remained in the possession of the Brabœufs until the death of Andrew Brabœuf in 1362, when it descended to his daughter Agnes and from her to her grandson Robert Danhurst. The arms of Robert Danhurst, as shown on his seal, were : A fess between three oxen's heads ; a coat clearly derived from Brabœuf. Robert died in 1481 and the manor passed to his grandmother's niece by marriage, Elizabeth and her husband Bernard Jenyn. Bernard Jenyn's great-grandson John died in 1545, leaving the property to his son Edward, then aged five years. Edward died a minor and was succeeded by his aunt Joan, wife of Robert Kemp. Their daughter Agnes, who held the manor in 1559, married John Wight of London. The manor descended to their son, Rice Wight, who died in 1602, and remained uninterruptedly in the hands of the Wight family from that time until the death of the widow of Albert Wight in 1914. The property, including the lordship of the manor, was then sold to the present owner and occupant of the manor house, who has preserved it intact and has restored some of the original features of the manor house, long obscured from view.

¹ It appears that Stephen de Thurnham's commission terminated at Rome, for at the end of their stay in that city the three ladies were sent on to Marseilles, via Pisa and Genoa, by the Pope in the charge of Cardinal Mellur. At Marseilles they were received by the King of Aragon, who escorted them through his domains to those of the Count of Saint Gilles, and, finally, the Count of Saint Gilles took them through his territories to the confines of Poitou. Roger de Hoveden, *sub* 1193.

² *Cal. Chart. Rolls*, Vol. I, p. 366.

Such, in brief, is the history of this exceptionally interesting manor, with its family connection continuing unbroken for over seven hundred years, during which the whole traditions of service to the state in return for the enjoyment of privilege were fully maintained. The charge given to Stephen de Thurnham in 1193, noted above, is only one among many noteworthy instances in the family records of services rendered to the Crown. The very name Brabœuf has a character all its own and the writer, with a feeling of mental pleasure which he hopes may be shared by his readers, frequently visualises that stalwart Norman knight who by some "dolorous stroke," to borrow Mallory's phrase, earned to himself the nickname *Bras de Bœuf* that was to be perpetuated in the Surrey countryside to the present day. It is worth noting that a family of this name still exists in France.

The arms of the Wights of Brabœuf in terms of the grant issued by William Dethick, Garter, to John Wight of London on February 2nd, 1588, which is written both in French and English, were:—

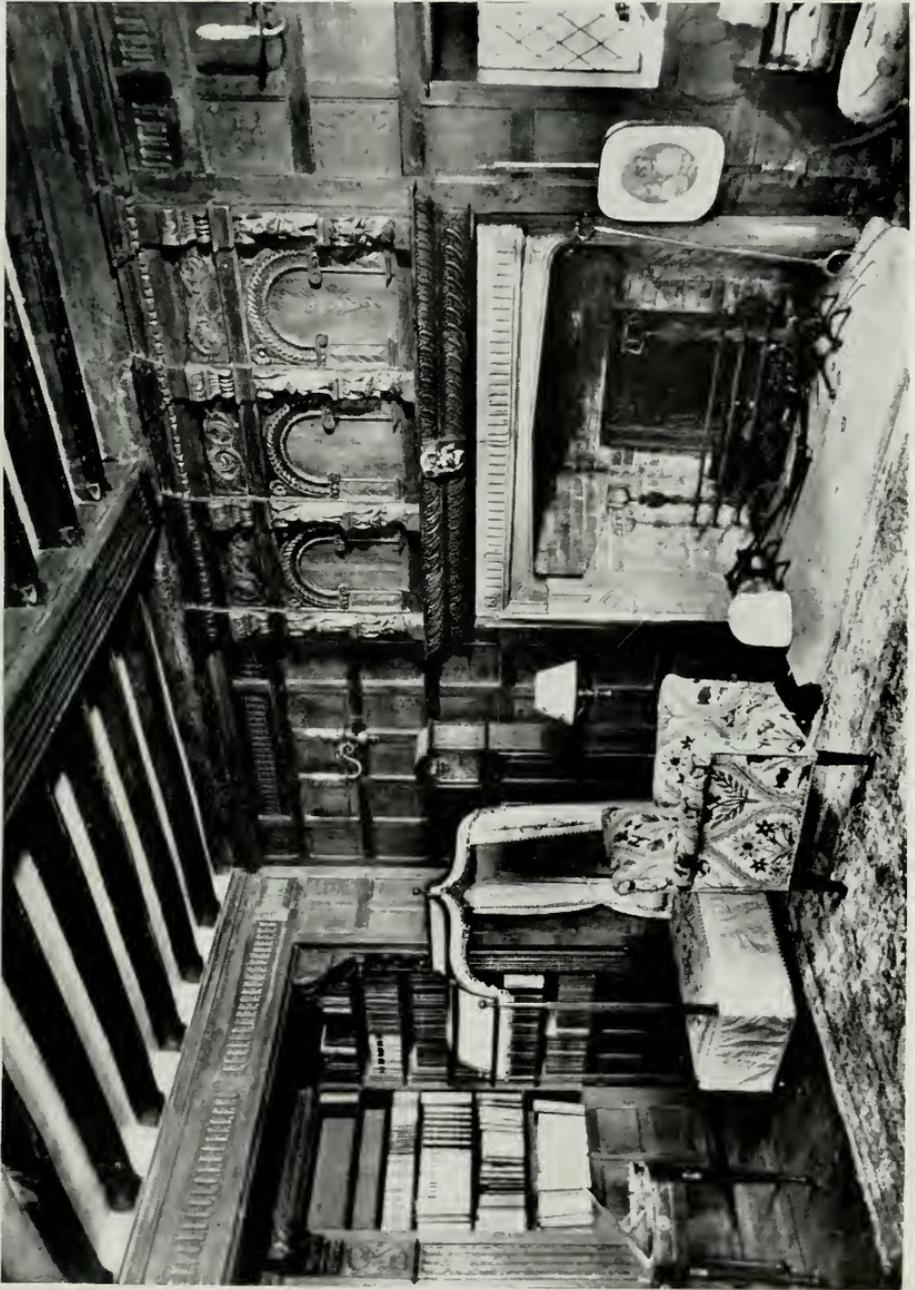
En champe de gules ung chevron d'Ermyne entre truis testes des ours coupez d'argent museaux ruby unne bordure engreille de perle Et sur le heulme pour tymbre ou cognoizance la teste d'ung Ours coupe d'argent et museaux avecque ung collier cheruivoance d'Ermyne, Mantellez de Mars et doublez de la lune.

Goules a chevron ermyne betwene three beares hedes coupee argent mouselled of the first a bordure engreyled silver and to his creast and cognizance A beares hed coupee argent mouselled a coller about his neck set upon a wrethe of his coullers upon a helmet Wth mantle of gules and argent.

The Manor House.

There is no record of the appearance of the manor house prior to 1586, when it was remodelled and largely rebuilt in timber, but some stone walls incorporated at the north and west may belong to an earlier stone structure. The building runs north and south; it faces towards the east and is three storeys in height, the top storey being formed in the roof. A portion of the east front, at the south end, projects slightly forward and two wings, one at each end, project out at the back. Originally the upper floors were reached by a newel stairway formed in the north-west wing and still in use, but about 1680 an oak open-well stairway was built in the space between the projecting wings at the back. An extension, one storey in height, which stood at the north end of the house and has since been pulled down, was probably added at this latter period.

About the middle of last century the house was thoroughly restored, the east front was faced in stone with stone mullioned windows, the porch and the gable above it were rebuilt, and additions were made on the south side and at the back. But, apart from these modern accretions, the building remains substantially as when completed in 1586 and, with its richly moulded ceiling beams, panelled rooms, and stone fireplaces, is a remarkably fine example



BRABEUF MANOR: LIBRARY.

of a manor house of moderate size of that period. The stone facing of the east front of the house does not replace the old timber framework, but is built immediately in front of it, the old framework still retaining its structural value.

An old dovecot which stood on the border of the garden to the east of the house has disappeared ; it is shown on a pastel drawing by John Russell, R.A., now hanging in the library, and in a sepia drawing of about 1800 by Moses Griffith, both in the possession of the owner (Plate VII).

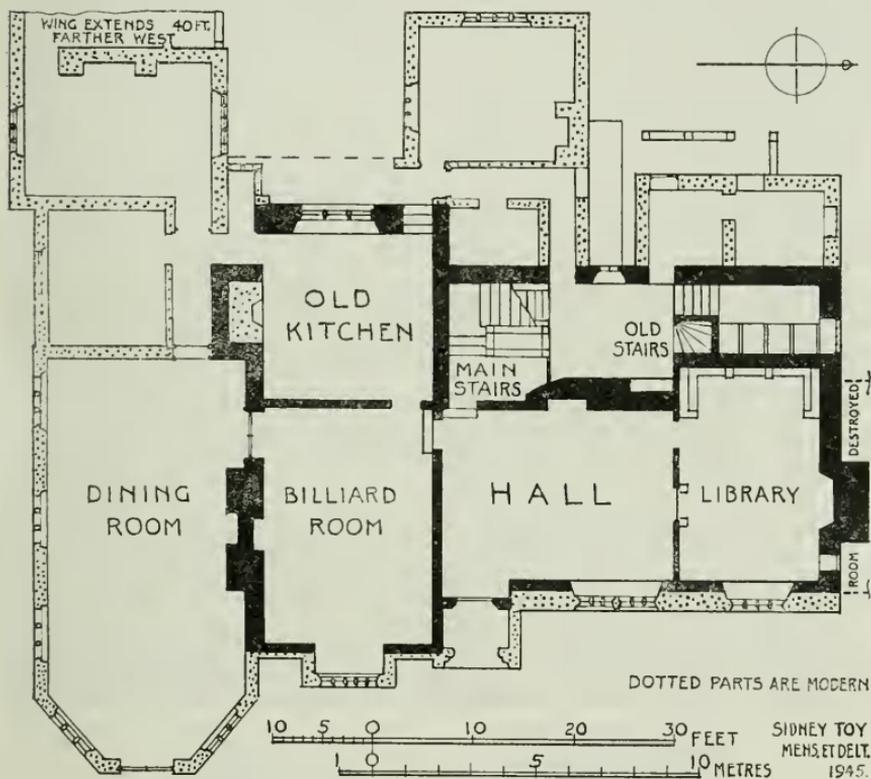


FIG. 1.—BRABŒUF MANOR: PLAN, GROUND FLOOR.

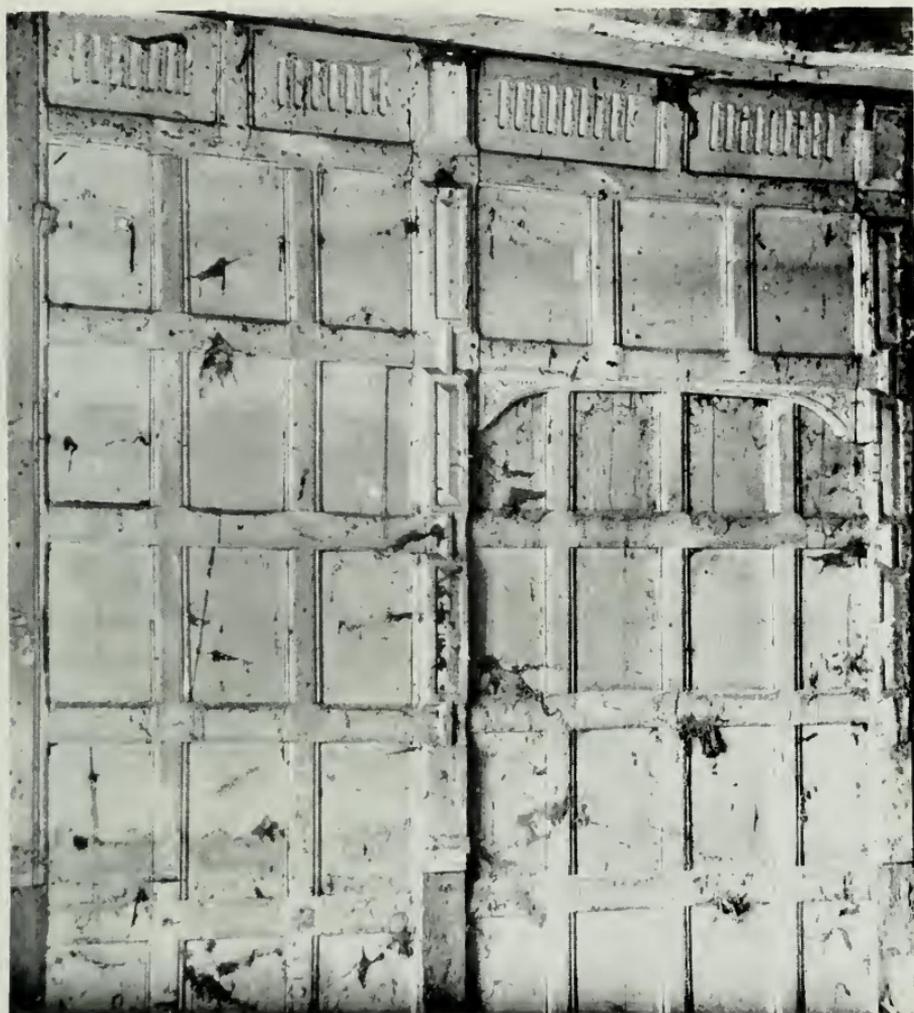
The hall, entered through the porch on the east front, is in the centre of the building and is the focal point from which all the rooms in the house can be reached ; a wood archway opposite the entrance opens to the main stairs (Fig. 1). The entrance doorway has a 16th century oak moulded frame which includes a window of two lights above the flat lintel ; the mouldings round the doorway finishing on stops in the jambs. The door, also of oak, is of a slightly later date ; it is of twelve panels, blocked out in the centre and surrounded by mouldings mitred at the angles. The hall has an exceptionally fine oak ceiling of richly moulded beams and

joists, all in excellent condition. The original fireplace and overmantel have disappeared and their places are now occupied by a modern stone fireplace and an oak overmantel made up of late 17th century and modern pieces.

The library was restored by the present owner in 1935 (Plate VIII). Before that date it had a plaster ceiling, its walls were covered with canvas, and there was a small iron grate in the fireplace. Following a test the plaster ceiling was removed, thereby exposing to view richly moulded joists, similar to those of the hall, which had been obscured for many years; unfortunately the mouldings of the central beam were so much mutilated that the beam had to be refaced. The canvas covering the walls was secured to wood battens and the battens were found to be nailed against the original oak panelling. In the middle of the partition on the south of the room the original doorway from the hall was discovered (Plate IX, *a*). This doorway has an arched head with leaf ornament in the spandrels and jambs decorated with moulded panels. Behind the iron grate the 16th century stone arched fireplace was found in position. It has a low wide arch with moulded edges finishing on stops at the jambs. There is a small round floral ornament carved in each spandrel with leaf decoration extending from it to the centre of the arch. On the horizontal face above the arch there is a continuous fluted band, terminating at each end in a small shield charged with a chevron; the chevron of that on the right bearing the date 1586, incised in contemporary figures (Plate IX, *b*). The shields doubtless represent the arms of Wight, granted in 1588, as noted above; the other charges, which were probably painted on, being obliterated. The date, two years before the grant of arms, most likely indicates the year of the rebuilding of the house and not the slightly later date when the fireplace was inserted.

All the modern wall covering has been cleared away and the panelling cleaned and repaired. The stone fireplace has been cleaned, repaired, and reset, and an oak overmantel, brought from elsewhere, set up above it. In removing the modern wall-covering the doorway which led out from this room to the one-storey north extension, now destroyed, was disclosed; its upper part has been opened out as a window. The west end of the room for its full width and height was occupied by a deep cupboard, divided into sections by 17th century fluted pilasters with carved consoles at their heads. The cupboard has been opened out and the space fitted with bookshelves divided into bays with four of the pilasters, the remaining two pilasters being set against the partition on the south side of the room. At the north-east corner of the room a portion of the post of the original framework of the east front of the house can be seen behind the panelling.

The walls of the hall and the library and both sides of the partition between them are covered for their full height with panelling in small panels, all largely of the late 16th century. That the hall



(a)



(b)

BRABŒUF MANOR: PANELLING AND CARVED SHIELD IN LIBRARY.

and the library have always been two separate rooms and have not been formed out of what was originally one room, as has been suggested,¹ is clear by the construction of the ceiling beams and their supports, by the panelling on the partition between them, and by the original provision of a fireplace in each of them; both rooms are remarkably lofty for their size and period.

The room to the south of the hall, now the billiard-room, has a lower ceiling and its floor is on a lower level than the hall, thus permitting extra height for the drawing-room immediately above it. In the ceiling the main beams only are exposed, and they are relatively rough, while the joists are covered with plaster. There is a modern bay window at the east end of the room and the walls are covered with modern panelling. A doorway in the west wall leads to the original kitchen; here on the south side is a large chimney which doubtless contains a wide fireplace and perhaps an oven, all now blocked except for a small modern firegrate.

West of the library there is a small but lofty room, used as a cellar, which is partly below but principally above ground level. It is entered from the space below the main stairway, and adjoining the doorway leading down to it is the old newel stairway, repaired and somewhat remodelled, which led, and still does lead, to the upper floors. A doorway opposite leads down under the main stairway to a cellar below the hall.

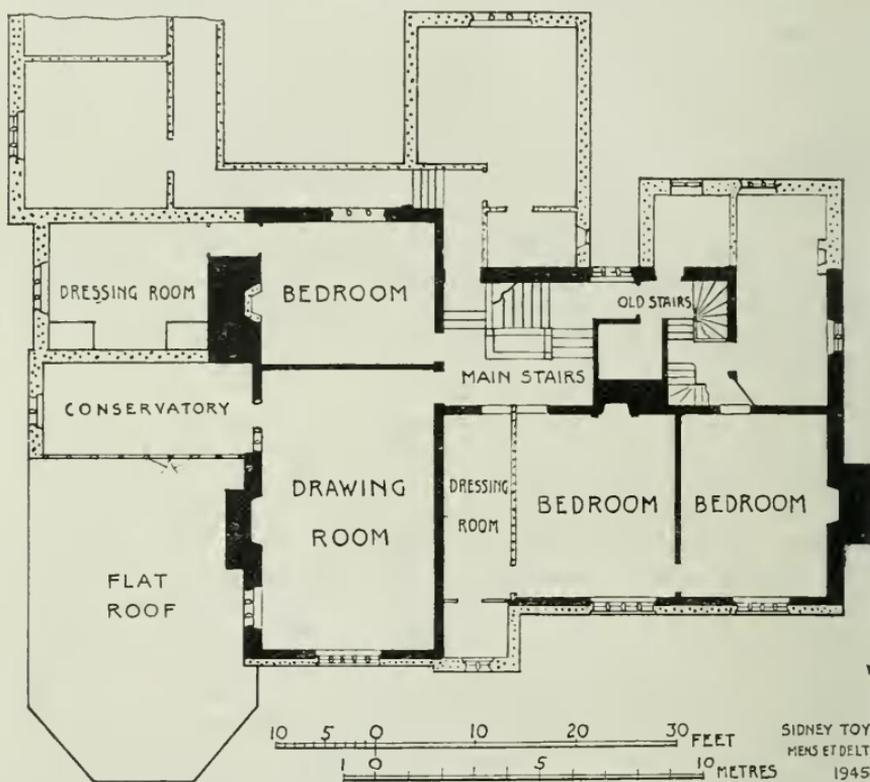
On the south side of the billiard-room is the present dining-room, a modern high and well-lighted apartment with panelled walls and decorative ceiling; it is a single-storey building with a flat roof, and west of it runs a long modern two-storey wing containing the present kitchen and domestic offices with bedrooms over. Other modern additions are at the north-west of the house and at the west of the main stairway. The present porch occupies the same position and space as the old one and, as at present, there was a clock and a timber bell-turret high above the porch before the restoration. The empanelled figure of a phoenix over the entrance to the porch is the fire-mark of the Phoenix Insurance Co.

The main stairway, which is built round a rectangular well, is a remarkably fine and substantial structure, set up about 1680 (Plate X). It has large square newels with panelled sides and polyhedral terminals, heavy moulded handrails, and turned balusters. The extension on the upper landing towards the west addition to the house is modern. The north rooms of the first floor are reached by a passage opening off the main stairway four steps short of the upper landing, but most of the rooms of this floor open from the upper landing (Fig. 2).

In the bedroom over the hall the walls are covered to their full height with panelling of about 1600. The ceiling is plastered but the main beams and wall plates are exposed, the central beam, running north and south, being moulded like those in the hall below and the others plain chamfered. The fireplace is modern.

¹ *V.C.H.*, Vol. III, p. 5.

On the south side of the room, now screened off to form a dressing-room, the original timber framework of the house is exposed, including a short portion of the east front, and a whole truss running across the room with its braces and supporting posts, the posts being 11 inches by 8 inches. In the bedroom over the library (Plate XI) the main timbers in the ceiling are also exposed but are of a less ornamental character than those of the room over the hall. The panelling here is principally of the 17th century. The



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FIG. 2.—BRABŒUF MANOR: PLAN, FIRST FLOOR.

fireplace has an overmantel of the late 17th century which is flanked by fluted pilasters rising from the floor to the cornice of the panelling.

The drawing-room has been considerably restored and remodelled ; its walls have modern panelling in oak, divided into bays by tall fluted pilasters, and the room has a plaster ceiling with ribs of geometrical pattern impanelling shields, portcullises, and floral ornament. On the south side of the room there is a fireplace and overmantel of chalk, dated 1586. The arch of the fireplace has mouldings with stops at the jambs similar to that in the library, but the decoration on the face above the arch is more elaborate,



BRABŒUF MANOR: STAIRCASE.



BRACEUF MANOR : BEDROOM OVER LIBRARY

panels of roses or portcullises alternating with panels of fluted ornament. The overmantel has two large panels, divided and flanked by small pilasters, one panel displaying a large Tudor rose and the other a portcullis, both in bold relief and each surmounted by a crown. These panel decorations of the overmantel appear to be of a later period. There is a moulded cornice over the panels, and above the cornice occurs the date 1586 in relief. The whole fireplace has been repainted and a modern surround inserted below the arch.

The bedroom over the old kitchen is panelled throughout from floor to ceiling; the panelling being of two periods, some of it, in small panels, dating from the first part of the 17th century, and the rest, in large panels, from about 1680. Doubtless the whole was put together here at the latter period and finished at the ceiling with the existing moulded cornice. On the lintel of the doorway, inside the room, there is a contemporary vertical bolt.

The stairways leading to the attics are at the north of the house, in continuation of the old newel stairway; there is a short section with moulded handrail and flat shaped balusters of the early part of the 17th century. In the attics the original roof timbers are exposed between the plaster panels. One attic room at the north-west is traditionally known as the chapel, probably because the older and eastern portion of it was used as a chapel at some period. The wing in which the room occurs has been extended westwards in modern times, and in making the extension, in order to give greater height to the low ceilinged bedroom immediately beneath, the ceiling of the bedroom was raised 6 inches at the point where the extension begins and consequently the floor of the "chapel" is stepped up 6 inches at the same point.

In conclusion it may not be out of place to put on record an instance showing how history repeats itself. When the present owner, on joining the newly formed Home Guard in 1940, had assigned to him the duty of constructing a small "blockhouse" for the defence of neighbouring cross lanes, he paraded in charge of a small detachment of five "retainers"—butler, chauffeur, and gardeners—with which to do the work. He thus found himself holding the lordship of the manor under precisely the same obligation as did Geoffrey de Brabœuf seven hundred years earlier; namely, when called upon to furnish his company of armed servants for the service of his liege lord the King and in the defence of the realm.