

THE COURT-HOUSE, CLAPTON-IN-GORDANO, SOMERSETSHIRE.

BY EDWARD WILLIAM GODWIN, ARCHITECT.

THIS interesting example of the domestic architecture of the middle ages is situated at the foot of Naish Hill, about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from Portishead, in the county of Somerset. Its pleasing situation, the small church close by upon a high bank amongst luxuriant foliage, the distance from the village and from all modern associations, and the picturesque seclusion of the spot give a singular charm to the manor-house of Clapton.¹

The plan of the old building, as nearly as I can determine, appears to have consisted of a parallelogram running east and west, with a tower attached to the north side. The tower, a considerable portion of the north front, the east wall, and some remains of the south wall, together with the buttery doors, are of a date anterior to the Reformation. There are some outhouses and an entrance gate of later character, but very plain and scarcely worthy of notice.

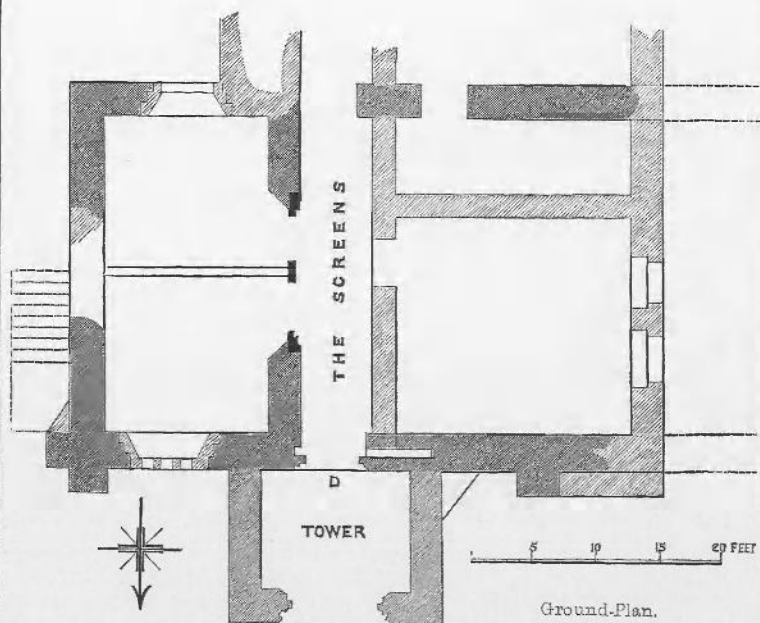
A great part of the walls of the main building, the inner doorway of the tower, the two buttresses at the north-east angle, and another buttress west of the tower, which has been partially built up in a modern chimney-breast, are of fourteenth century work. The roof is comparatively modern, but the corbels and summer-stones of the coping at the east end indicate the original direction and pitch, and also fix the termination of the house eastward. There is, however, a portion of a rough arch in this wall, a blocked up doorway, a corbel, and a singularly placed moulding on the south side of the buttress, which point to the existence of further works, possibly of wood, now destroyed. The blocked up doorway and the moulding appear to have reference to an exterior flight of stairs: and the absence of buttresses at the south-east angle seems to indicate a junction with some

¹ A short notice of the architectural features of this interesting structure is given by Mr. Parker, in his *Domestic Architecture in England*, Part ii. p. 337.

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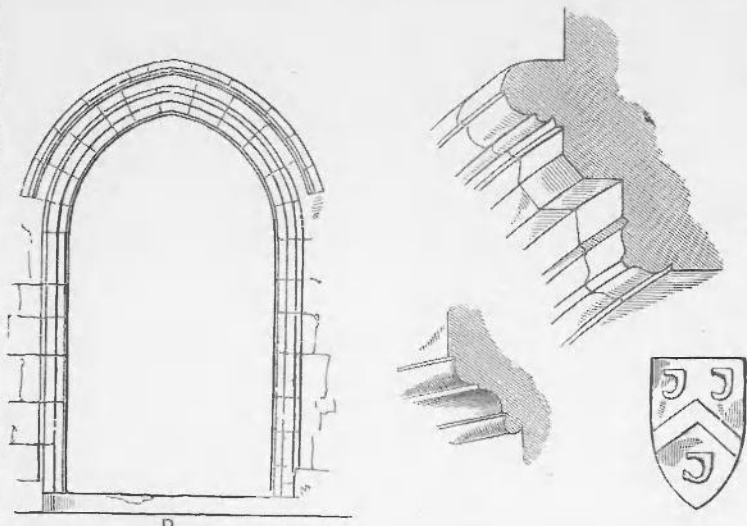


North-East View of the Tower.

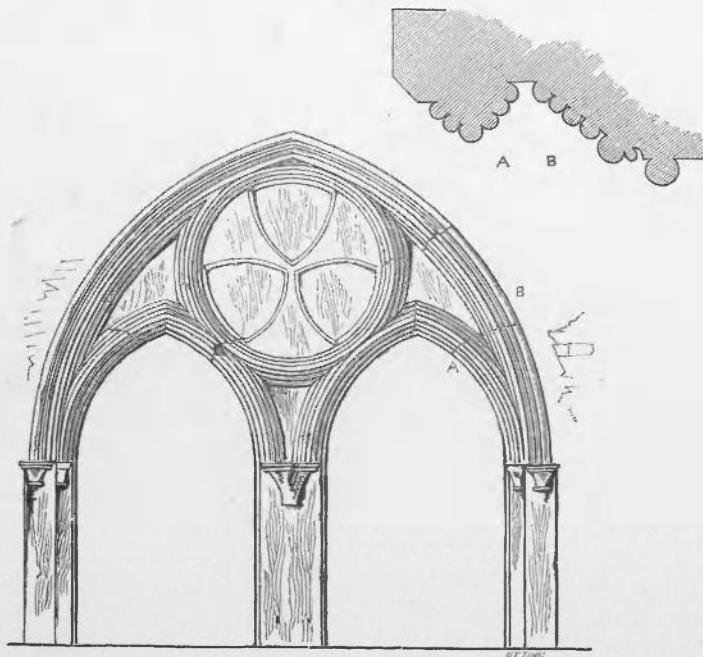


Ground-Plan.

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Door from the Tower; section of its hoodmould: section of corbel, East end:
and an escutocheon of the Arms of Arthur.



Double Doorway of oak, between the Screens and the Buttery.

other building, probably the kitchen, which may also have been constructed of wood. The buttresses are of two stages, with bold sloping base moldings, which continue along the wall. There are no windows in any part of the house earlier than the fifteenth century. Indeed there is only one even of this date in the main building. It was inserted probably when the tower was added (*circa* 1440), but whether in the position it now occupies eastward of the tower is very doubtful. The construction is somewhat singular, and, from the unmeaning and unfinished manner in which it projects, induces the opinion that it originally formed part of an oriel window and probably in another part of the house.

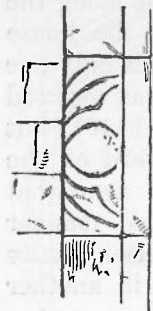
The inner doorway of the tower is of the same date as the walls and buttresses before described, and with them forms the remnant of the manor-house as rebuilt in the fourteenth century (*circa* 1310). The mouldings are continuous, and it has a very bold hoodmould consisting of the roll and bead; the terminations, if there were any, have been destroyed. Passing through this doorway we enter the screens or passage which divided the hall from the buttery and sewery. Of the screen itself, the minstrels' gallery, or the principal hall, which extended westward, nothing remains beyond the small fragment of wall shown on the plan. But on the east side of the passage there is preserved a feature of very great interest, namely, a double doorway entirely constructed of oak, and which must have belonged to a house of an earlier date than any portion of that in which it is now found.² The accompanying woodcuts will sufficiently explain its form and details, which are purely Early English, and belong quite to the commencement of the thirteenth century (*circa* 1210).

The tower, as before mentioned, is of one date, *circa* 1440; it consists of three stories. The lower one forms an entrance porch, and has a lofty and well proportioned doorway with

² This interesting feature has been thus noticed by Mr. Parker, in describing the solid wall at the lower end of the hall: "in the middle a wide pointed arch is pierced; this is filled with a wooden screen of the exact form of a two-light window, with a circle in the head filled with three spherical triangles, forming a perfect window with geome-

trical tracery of the time of Edw. II.; the two lower lights being rather wide and standing on the ground, form doorways; the whole of this work is richly moulded, and all cut out of oak; it is probably the most remarkable piece of early wooden domestic screen-work in existence."—*Domestic Architecture*, Part ii. p. 338.

hoodmould termination of male heads, one mitred, the other turbaned. The second story or first floor is entered from a



Incised Stone in the Jamb of one of the Turret Doors.

passage above the sewery and buttery, through a small four-centred doorway. It is lighted by two square-headed windows, each of two lights, looking north and east; in the west wall is a plain square fire-place, and close by its side a small four-centred doorway communicates with a turret staircase, which on the exterior is picturesquely corbeled out from the angle. The third story is lighted by two windows of the same character as those below, but the lights are trefoiled instead of cinquefoiled. From the turret an ogee-headed doorway opens to a V roof, which has been substituted for the original lead-flat. The flue of the fire-place in the second story terminates in one of the battlements. There are five or six grotesque gurgoyles to the cornice, and over the principal doorway is a small cinquefoiled panel enclosing an escutcheon charged with the arms of the Arthur family, a chevron between three lance rests, impaling those of Berkeley, a chevron between ten crosses pattee.³ Over the east window of the second story the arms of Arthur again occur in a cinquefoiled panel. The base moulding of the tower is simply chamfered, and has a very weak effect by the side of the bold earth-table of the earlier building.

Some account of the descent of the manor of Clapton-in-Gordano is given by Collinson, in his History of Somersetshire. He considers it to have been the Clotune of Domesday, which was held by Herluin of the Bishop of Coutance, and had been held by Algar in the time of Edward the Confessor.⁴ It was subsequently held of the honour of Gloucester by a family named de Clapton, from the place of their residence. To Arthur de Clapton, who possessed lands there 25 Hen. I., succeeded Nigel Fitz-Arthur, in the reign of Stephen; his successors took the name of Arthur, and bore for their arms *gu.* a chevron *arg.* between three clarions

³ Collinson, Hist. of Somerset, vol. iii. p. 179, observes that from these arms it seems probable that Richard Arthur, who married Alice, daughter of James Lord Berkeley, in the time of Henry VI., may have erected this portion of the

fabric.

⁴ Domesday Book, vol. i., f. 88, a. A place called Claptone occurs also in that record, f. 97, b, held of Turstin Fitz Ralph by Radulfus, and in the time of the Confessor by Alnodus.

or horsemen's rests *or*, in allusion, probably, as Collinson conjectures, to the arms of Robert, Earl of Gloucester. He gives some further account of the family, until the manor passed by marriage to the Winter family of Dyrham, Gloucestershire, about the commencement of the seventeenth century.⁵

⁵ Collinson, History of Somerset, vol. iii. p. 177.