

## Breadsall Priory.

### I.

#### THE PRIORY.

By P. H. CURREY, *Hon. Secretary.*

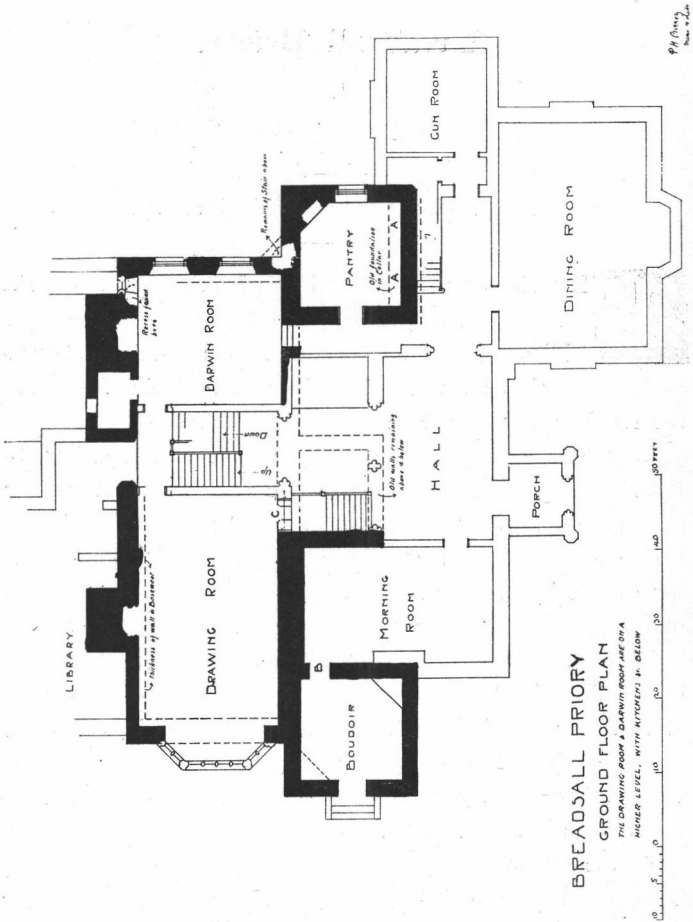


THE site of Breadsall Priory of itself almost suggests a monastic establishment; a secluded hollow among the hills, well wooded, and with a stream of water, such as the excellent judgment of the founders of the religious houses seemed always to secure.

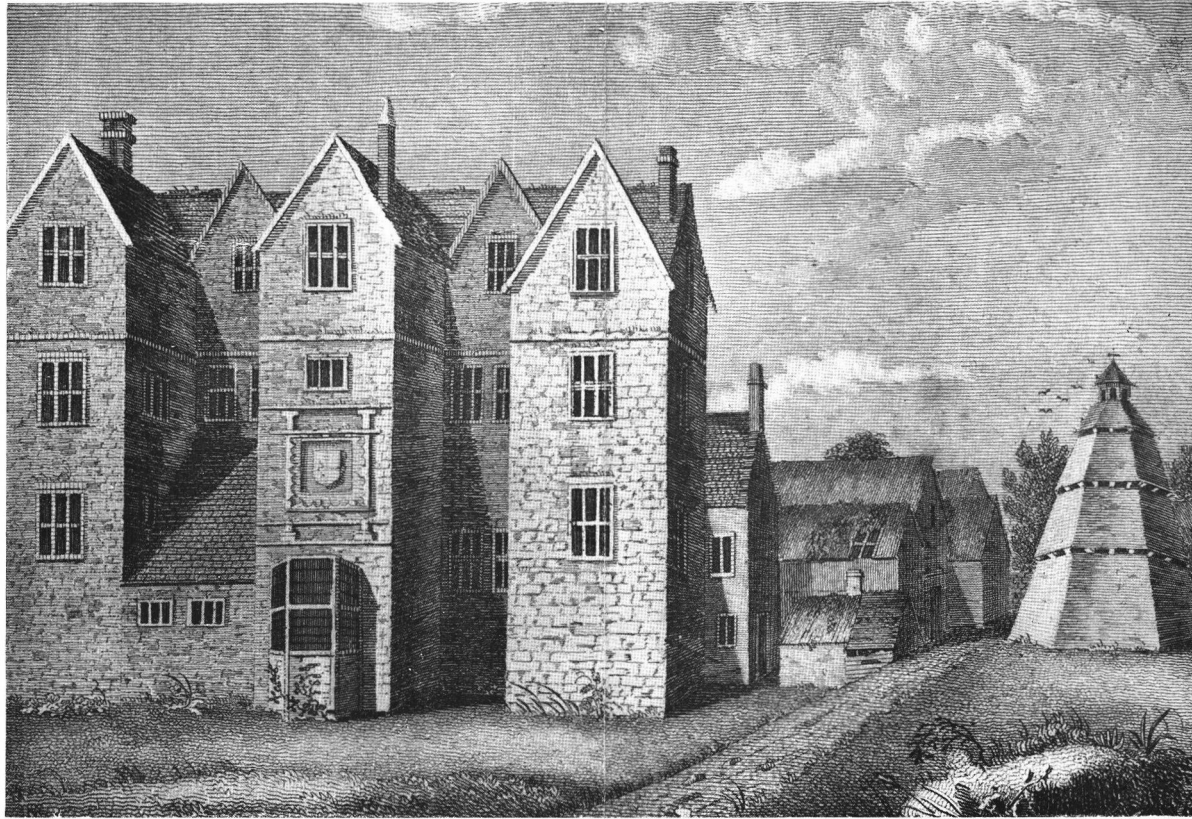
A careful examination of Sir A. Seale Haslam's beautiful home fails to show any part of the buildings that can with certainty be attributed to monastic times; indeed, so frequent and extensive have been the alterations and additions that were made by its various owners during the last two centuries, that such remains were scarcely to be looked for with any confidence. It is rather surprising to find the Elizabethan house, built by Sir John Bentley on the ruins of the Priory, still remaining almost intact and incorporated in the existing mansion. The Priory seems, even in its most prosperous days, to have been a very small establishment, and its buildings can never have been very extensive.

In the cellar, under the present butler's pantry, is a stone wall about four feet thick (marked "A" on accompanying plan). This wall carries the north-east tower of the Elizabethan house, but from its position and its unnecessary thickness it seems almost certainly to be a remnant of the foundation of the Priory. In the space under the floor of the morning room are four old stone walls enclosing a rectangular area; three

of these walls have a dressed stone plinth, and in one is a small blocked up doorway with chamfered jambs (in the position marked "B" on the plan). These walls are sometimes attributed to the Priory, but careful measurements show



those with the plinth to be the lower parts of the walls of the Elizabethan house, while the fourth wall is the foundation of a lean-to addition, which the engraving of the front of the house made in 1791 shows to have been inserted between



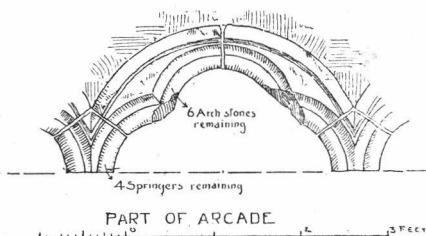
BREADSALL PRIORY, DERBYSHIRE.

*Published by J. Robson, New Bond Street, Oct. 1, 1791.*

*Reproduced from a photograph by A. Victor Haslam, 1905.*

the central bay and the south-east tower. There is, of course, the possibility, or perhaps, rather, probability, that the Priory was not entirely pulled down, and that Sir John Bentley used one of the domestic buildings to form the shell of his house, raising it to the present height and adding the three projecting bays or towers; but it seems now impossible to find any evidence upon which a definite opinion upon this point could be based.

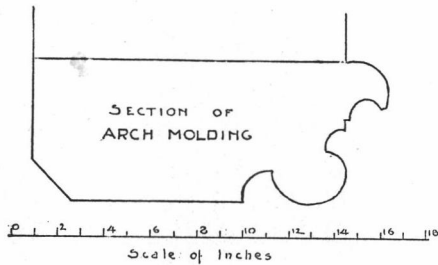
Sir Francis Darwin is said to have made excavations upon the site, and to have laid bare the foundations of the Priory Church, which were, most unfortunately, swept away or entirely covered up when the additions to the house were made by Mr. Morley, and, so far as can be ascertained, no record of them is in existence. These excavations must, presumably, have



been on the north side of the eighteenth century wing shown on the old drawings, and therefore somewhere about the position where the gun room is marked on the accompanying plan. In the garden are a few fragments of the monastic buildings which were unearthed during Sir Francis Darwin's excavations. The chief of these consists of a portion of a thirteenth century arcade shown on the accompanying sketch. At first sight this suggests the Sedilia, but the fact that there are four complete springers to the arches, showing the former existence of at least five openings, militates against this theory\*. It might be a portion of a wall arcade running round the interior of the church, a feature which was of very common occurrence

\* Sedilia of more than three stalls are not unknown: instance the five stalls at Southwell Minster and Furness Abbey.

in thirteenth century buildings; or perhaps it might have formed the heads of the stalls in the Chapter House. The chamfer on the back of the arches (see section of moulding) is very puzzling, seeming to show that the back as well as the front of the arcade was exposed to view; but it must be noted that the back face of the stones is only roughly dressed with a scappler's pick and not tooled to a fair face. The ends of the cusps are all broken, so that it is impossible to say whether they were foliated or not. The other fragments comprise portions of an octagonal cap from a small turret or pinnacle; these are, however, probably some of the stones from the tower of All Saints' Church, Derby, referred to by Dr. Cox in *Churches of Derbyshire*, Vol. III., p. 76. Another fragment is



one stone of a square-headed window, probably late fourteenth century work; this has never been glazed, but is rebated on the inner face for a wooden shutter.

On the ruins of the Priory Sir John Bentley, who died in 1621, built himself a house, which, though now almost lost to sight among more recent additions, is found by careful measurements to be still substantially intact. On the accompanying plan the walls which belong to Sir John Bentley's house are blacked, whilst all later additions are shown in outline only, in order that the extent of the old work may be more readily comprehended.

From the drawings of the old house, and from the few original features which have been allowed to remain unaltered, we can

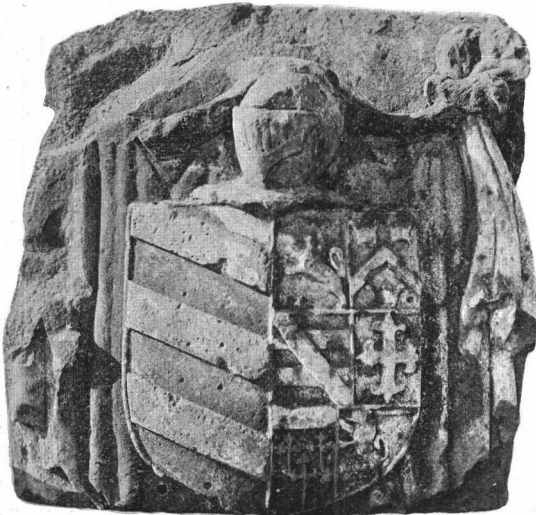


BREADSALL PRIORY. THE EAST FRONT.

*A. Victor Haslam.*

gather that the style of the work was such as prevailed about the year 1600. An engraving, published in 1791, and oil paintings of about the same date in the possession of Sir A. Seale Haslam, show us a typical late Elizabethan or early Jacobean house.

The east front of the house is now almost hidden by the additions made by Mr. Francis Morley, and part of the west side by the wing which was added (in place of one built by Mr. Morley) by the present owner. On the south side the



*A. Victor Haslam.*

Breadsall Priory. Coat of Arms in stone of Sir John Bentley.

south-east tower has been raised and finished in a pseudo-castellated style, and almost entirely refaced, giving it a very modern appearance, and the large Elizabethan windows have been replaced by the drawing-room bay in Victorian Gothic. On the north side the old walling appears, but the windows have been altered by the insertion of eighteenth century sashes. It is, therefore, only on the attic floor that the character of the old work can be seen; the mullioned windows and many

gables, though rather spoiled by modern copings and "Gothic" finials, have a very picturesque effect, appearing, as they do, over the roofs of the later additions, as seen in the accompanying views of the east and south sides of the house.

It is interesting to speculate, but impossible to speak definitely, upon its original plan. The internal partitions would almost certainly have been of timber, but they are now replaced by brick walls. A careful consideration of the plans and study of the old drawings lead to the conclusion that the general internal arrangements are not much altered, though completely modernized. The entrance would probably be in the centre bay, and would be approached from the ground by a flight of steps, as the floor level is considerably above the remains of the external plinth. This entrance is shown in Ravenhill's engraving of 1791 as then closed up with a bay window, and a new entrance seems to have been made in the added "Georgian" wing. Over the entrance was a coat of arms, now in the garden (shown in the accompanying photograph), which Dr. Cox has kindly described for us, as follows:—

This shield represents Bentley impaling a quartered coat of six, pertaining to the Cheshire family of Legh or Leigh. It runs thus, in heraldic phraseology, the colours of course not appearing on the stone:—Or, three bends sa. (Bentley) impaling (1 and 6), Or, a lion rampant gu. (the old coat of Leigh of High Leigh); (2) Az., a chevron between three crowns or (Corona, or De Corona, of Adlington); (3) Az., two bars over all a bend gu. (Leigh of Adlington); (4) Arg., a cross fleury sa. (another Leigh of Cheshire coat); (5) Gu., three cross crosslets fitchy or (Arderne, Cheshire). The fifth quartering is now nearly illegible. It would require a long pedigree and notes to explain the right of Sir John Bentley's second wife to these various Leigh quarterings. The best pedigree of Leigh of Adlington, with a full account of their various marriages, is to be found in Earwaker's *East Cheshire*. Three of these coats appear in an old quartered shield of stained glass in the east window of the north aisle of Prestbury Church, Cheshire.

The carved panel above this coat of arms has been discovered, in its original position, which is now *inside* the house, but exposed to view. A section of it is well shown in the accompanying photograph, and appears very characteristic of the unsophisticated work of the country masons of the period.



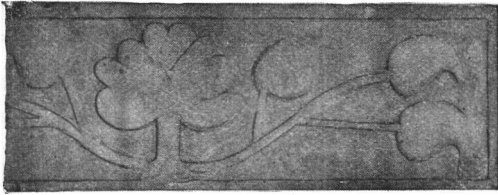


BREADSALL PRIORY. THE SOUTH FRONT.

*A. Victor Haslam.*

From the entrance, steps would lead down, as at present, to the ground floor, on which were the kitchen and, probably, the bakehouse, butteries, etc.; a flight of stairs would ascend to the hall and parlour on the first floor. This plan of placing the offices on a floor below the chief rooms was not very common, but is occasionally met with in Elizabethan houses.

On the second floor there would again be two large rooms, one of which would be the great chamber, which, like the hall below, is shown on the painting of the south side to be lighted with a large window of eighteen lights. In the projecting bays the two lowest floors would probably be pantries, while the upper floors would be occupied as bed chambers, or "lodgings," as they are usually described on plans of the period. The upper floors of these bays were approached by



*A. Victor Haslam.*

Breadsall Priory. Portion of carved stone panel.

steps in half-external turrets corbelled out across the angles, parts of which still remain, one of them being shown on the view of the south front. Indications were recently found, on the first floor, that the turrets continued to the floor below, and were therefore not originally carried on corbels as at present. The attic floor remains very much in its original condition, the windows, with moulded mullions and transomes, being little altered, except that a partition has been made along the east side, so that the windows there now throw their light down into the corridor on the floor below. The original position of the stairs is rather puzzling. They would probably have been nearly, but not quite, in the same position as the present principal staircase. The evidence of the buildings tends to show that the

floor levels in the old part of the house are (except in the south-east Tower, which is obviously altered) very nearly in their original position, and this is confirmed by a portion of one of the old mullioned windows which has lately been discovered and opened out. If this is the case, the floors in the bays were not, except in the attic, level with those in the main block, and the rooms being lower, these bays contained an additional floor. The old engraving of the east front does not agree with this, as it shows the windows nearly in line with each other; but it is impossible to trust to the accuracy of old engravings in detail, and the oil painting of the south end confirms the idea that the floors were on different levels.

In the garden are two quaint stone figures, of which illustrations are given. The most probable explanation of them is that they were caryatides supporting a chimney-piece.

In the basement is a small doorway with a square head, and chamfered all round, now blocked up, opening into the basement of the central bay ("C" on plan), and under the floor of the morning room can be seen the chamfered jambs of an originally external doorway into the basement of the south-east bay ("B" on plan).

In the large projecting chimney stack of the kitchen and rooms over, there is on each of the upper floors a small closet. These are said until lately to have had no floors, but to have been open from top to bottom of the building. Of this it is difficult to determine the original purpose, but the possibility of sanitary conveniences suggests itself. When a new window was recently being cut through the wall on the opposite side of the chimney stack, in the room now called the "Darwin room," a recess was found, just large enough for a man to stand upright in; it was rounded at the back and top, and the stonework dressed smooth. The description given of it seems to suggest a "priest hole," or hiding place. Unfortunately its destruction was unavoidable.

A feature of the old house which should not be overlooked, but which has unfortunately disappeared, is the dove-cote.

Was this a survival of the monastic days, when the dove-cote seems to have been a profitable source of income to the Brothers? In ancient times there seems to have been some privilege in the possession of a dove-cote, but how, or upon



Breadsall Priory. Stone Caryatides.

*A. Victor Haslam.*

what terms, that privilege was obtained I have been unable exactly to determine. It seems to have been a common opinion that no one but the lord of the manor or the parson could erect a dove-cote, and this custom has been quoted in several

legal actions with respect to the damage done to crops by pigeons; but the law on the subject seems to have been uncertain. By a case in the law courts in 1618 it was practically decided that anyone might build a dove-cote. References, however, were then made to license by the King and to a statute of Edward II. concerning dove-cotes erected without licence, the exact meaning of which is not very clear.

The subsequent additions to the house, as before mentioned, have been very extensive. The oil painting of 1790 shows a long projecting wing on the site of the present dining-room, which, judging from its style, and from the fact that it is not shown on the engraving published in 1791\*, could not then have long been built; and its erection must be attributed to Andrew Greensmith, or possibly to Herbert Greensmith Beard, to whom the property passed in 1788. A lean-to addition had been made between the central bay and the south-east tower, the foundations of which still exist, and a bay window had been inserted in the place of the old entrance, besides additions at the back of the house. The wing must have been removed by Mr. Francis Morley, who erected in front of the Elizabethan house the present "Gothic" building.

The latest alterations embraced the partial removal of buildings which had been added at the west side of the house and the erection of the present billiard-room wing, which has added very greatly both to its internal comfort and external appearance.

Breadsall Priory is not without the usual tradition of a subterranean passage. In this connection it may be interesting to quote from a letter written a short time ago by the late Miss A. E. Darwin:—

"My father did attempt to find it (the passage); he dug a trench all along the back of the house running parallel with the kitchen-windows, hoping to come upon the roof of the passage from above, and whilst doing this he came upon the foundations and sedilia

\* In a comprehensive work such as that in which this engraving appears there often was a considerable interval between the date of the drawing and the publication of the engraving from which it was copied.

(arches) of the Chapel. These latter he recovered entirely and set them up against the back of the dining-room wall. Two of the arches were perfect as I draw them, the third was not so complete. Of course the stones were found lying about, but my father, with the assistance of Mr. Fox (Rector of Morley, and a great archæologist), put them all correctly in their places, and very beautiful they looked. He was satisfied for the time being with this important discovery and went no deeper in his search for the passage. The story belonging to this is as follows:—‘There was an old butler in the service of Dr. Erasmus Darwin; when my father (Sir Francis) was a boy, he was told by this man that *his* father knew of this secret passage, *and had been in it*; also that he himself in his boyhood, had seen the stone with a ring in it, in the cellar, which gave access to it. The floor of the cellar has doubtless been somewhat raised since then. My father took up some of the flags and found faint traces of a second floor but no stone with ring.’”