

Brief Remarks on Elsing Hall.

COMMUNICATED BY

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ELSING HALL has for several centuries been the residence of a family connected with many celebrated houses; including Valence Earl of Pembroke, Grey de Ruthyn, Spencer, Paston, Wodehouse, Astley, L'Estrange, Talbot, Morley, and others, and the Family Pedigree forms the subject of an interesting paper by Mr. Carthew in our present volume.

It was the property of the Foliots, until Sir Richard Foliot's daughter Margery married Sir Hugh Hastings, commander of King Edward the Third's army in Flanders; and it was the residence of that family until it passed to the Brownes, by the marriage of Anne, eldest daughter and co-heiress of Sir Hugh Hastings, with William Browne, shortly before the year 1554.

During the last two centuries the house has suffered considerably from alterations and destruction; but in the course of a partial restoration in 1852 many interesting remains were observed, which the following remarks, and the illustration accompanying, are intended to describe.

The house stands on the south side of a large area, enclosed by a moat filled by a stream of water, which probably also supplied the fish-ponds still existing at a short distance to the west. On the west, north, and east sides the moat

consisted of a single channel, from 20 to 80 feet in width, and about 12 feet in depth of water; and on these three sides the enclosure was defended by a wall of considerable strength, with occasional turrets and buttresses, the remains of which are still visible, as well as the abutments of the bridge and gate-house. Westward of the bridge these walls are of flint-work, extremely strong, and apparently of the thirteenth or early in the fourteenth century; but to the east of the bridge they are of brick-work. There was also a wall on the south side of the enclosure, but it appeared never to have been carried up much above the level of the ground, nor to have been intended for defence. On this side the moat consists of three deep channels, between each of which is a bank, now under the surface of the water. The two outer banks appear to have extended westward of the present building, and to have surrounded other enclosures; but nearly all traces of these have now disappeared. Adjoining the eastern walls foundations were found of offices and buildings, supposed by some to have been stables.

Indications were found in the house which proved that most of the foundations are of thirteenth-century work, and some fragments are still visible, built into later walls, two examples of which are given in the illustration. The house, therefore, presents the plan of an early residence, although the porch, the dais window, the doorways, and other openings are of much later date. Judging from the mouldings, tracery, and the figures holding shields of arms on the porch, these later works were probably completed by John Hastings, who had the estate from the year 1436 to 1477.

The plan given in the illustration shews the walls as existing previous to the late alterations; and it is remarkable that, on the east, north, and west sides, the walls are of solid flint and freestone; but on the south side, facing the triple moat, they are of herring-boned brick-work, between timber studs.

In the centre of the building is the dining-hall, open to the oak roof, which is constructed in the manner indicated in the illustration, the spaces between the upright timbers being filled with herring-boned brick-work.

The Hall had a dais at the east end, with a bay window, and a gallery at the west, under which are the doors to the kitchen and offices. The head of one of these doors is drawn in the illustration. The Hall was formerly lighted by two windows in the south wall, in addition to the present north windows, in all of which there were provisions for shutters, but no appearance of permanent glazing, although quarries painted with a continuous rosetree and birds sitting thereon were found, which must have been temporarily fixed to the iron bars. There was a fire-place and chimney apparently built in to the original wall in brick-work. The kitchens and offices had been altered so often that not much of interest remained, but the rooms to the east of the Hall still retain their general arrangement. Opposite the bay window on the dais was a passage leading to the long drawing-room. In this passage there was a staircase leading to the long room over the drawing-room. Whether this staircase was original or not there were no means of determining; but there was a spiral staircase (shewn in the plan at *s*) communicating with the chamber or solar, and the drawing-room, as well as with a cellar or vault under the drawing-room. The chamber was formerly the entire length of the building, with a large arched fire-place opening in the centre, in front of which a second fire-place had been built early in the seventeenth century. The walls of this room were originally richly coloured, numerous traces of the colour still remaining although not intelligible, with the exception of the stalk and scroll border indicated in the illustration, which extended round the upper part of the room. From this room there was a small window looking into the dining hall, and an opening to the chapel, and to a

building containing the necessarium, of which the foundations only remain, abutting upon the moat. In the chapel, traces were found of the piscina and sedilia on the south side, the raised floor for the altar, the indentations in the wall formed for the brackets to support the altar, and a gallery at the west end upon which the doorway from the solar opened. There were also remains of paintings upon the walls.

The sketch and plan in the illustration are intended to shew the buildings and remains of enclosing walls as they appeared in 1852, when all that was undoubtedly modern had been removed: the bird's-eye-view being regarded from the south-east. The details comprise one of the oak heads of the doorways in the hall, already referred to, representing a boar hunt, which was well and boldly carved; but the other spandrils were too much decayed to be delineated. The figure holding a shield represents one of four similar finials to buttresses already referred to, which are all artistically sculptured, although it is singular that the mason appears in three of the shields to have copied the armorial bearings from reversed drawings or matrices of seals, thus placing Foliot first and fourth, Hastings second and third, and reversing the Morley charge, as may be seen in the sketch marked A B C; but in the other shield, the sketch of which is marked D, Hastings is first and fourth, and Foliot second and third.

During the repairs, the accumulations of weeds and soil were taken out of the moat, but nothing was found except numerous antlers and glass bottles made with the name of *Thos. Browne* upon them, and a small mourning gimmel ring, with the inscription "FFORGET . ME . NOT" therein, of about the reign of James I.