

SOME NOTES ON ELTHAM HISTORY.

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BY

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WITHIN the boundaries of this interesting village there exist, or have existed until quite recently, relics of the handiwork of men that have come down from the remotest periods of history.

If "denc-holes" are of pre-historic origin, a matter upon which antiquarians are not yet agreed, we had, up till a few years ago, an unusually fine example of these mysterious works. This, however, has been filled up to meet the requirements of the builder.

The old Roman Road, which crosses Shooter's Hill, and leads from London to the sea, forms the northern boundary of the parish; and constructed, as it is said to have been, upon the line of a more ancient trackway, not only associates the parish with Roman times, but also with British. This road was subsequently called Watling Street, and later on was known as the Old Dover Road. It has a romantic story to tell. Along its early course the Britons conveyed their baskets for exportation to the Continental markets. It saw the advance of the conquering hosts of Cæsar; and, four centuries and more later, it was along this ancient way, now reconstructed upon Roman methods, that the great exodus took place when the Roman Legions were recalled for the defence of Rome. The most direct route

as it was to the Continent, the old road could tell many an interesting tale of the march of armies, of royal processions, of pilgrimages to the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury, of travellers in peril of robbers, of gibbetings frequent, and a hundred other incidents that it must have witnessed in the course of its existence right down through the centuries.

We are reminded of our Saxon forefathers by the Common, which we are just as ready now to protect against encroachment as were our ancestors. The name Eltham also is Saxon, being formerly "Eald-ham," or "Old-Home." The Domesday reference indicates the transition period from English to Norman dominance. Alwold, the Englishman, who held the manor direct from King Edward, gave place to Haimo, the Norman, a relative of the Conqueror, who held the manor under Odo, the Bishop, and half-brother of the King.

The grey ruins of the Palace, with the moat, the bridge, the quaint wooden dwellings in the outer courtyard, point to those three centuries and more when Eltham was the abode of Kings, and there comes before our mind's eye a panorama of events, striking and picturesque, many of which have been associated with momentous incidents in our national history.

In the days of Henry III, the manor was held in trust by Anthony Bek, the Prince Bishop of Durham, who subsequently beautified the Palace and handed it over to Isabella, the fickle Queen of Edward II. Here was born her second son, John of Eltham. This prince died, while campaigning in Scotland, before he was twenty years of age, and was brought to London by his brother, Edward III, and interred with much pomp in Westminster Abbey, where his tomb may still be seen.

Edward the Third was often at Eltham. According to Nicolas, it was at the Palace here that the inauguration of the "Order of the Garter" is likely to have taken place. Here he celebrated the great victories of Crecy and Calais by a tournament to which the best blood of the country and the Continent were invited.

It was at the gate of the Palace that Edward and his Queen Phillipa welcomed the return of John of France to voluntary exile, after that chivalrous monarch had been to France to attempt the raising of funds to purchase his liberty. Froissart has much to say of Eltham in these days, and, in addition to his graphic prose accounts of Eltham incidents, has left us a quaint poem, obviously written to commemorate the occasion of the French King's progress.

Richard II lived much at Eltham, and feasted his court and followers on a gigantic scale. Here he was visited by Froissart, who presented the King, in his bed-chamber, with his "Book of Amours and Moralities."

It was to Eltham Palace that Chaucer was riding to fulfil his duties as Steward of the Palace when he was waylaid and robbed of horse and money at the "Fowle Oak," at Hatcham, and we have in existence the writ discharging Chaucer from the responsibility of the debt incurred by the loss of the royal moneys. This writ was drawn up by a council held at the Palace of Eltham.

It was at Eltham Palace that Bolingbroke bade farewell to King Richard prior to his exile to France, and here he came to reside when, as Henry IV, he had superseded the weak and foolish monarch. It was in the Palace Chapel that Henry was married by proxy to Joan, the Princess of Navarre. In the absence of the

princess, one of her esquires, a certain Antoine Reizi, acted as her representative, and it was upon his finger that King Henry placed the ring, and with him exchanged the usual marriage vows.

Here, too, it was that the Council sat, under Henry IV, which drew up the famous "Statute of Heretics," designed to crush out Lollardism. This is one of the black pages in the history of Eltham. "By the provisions of this infamous Act," writes Green, the historian, "bishops were not only permitted to arrest and imprison, so long as their heresy should last, all preachers of heresy, all schoolmasters infected with heretical teaching, all owners and writers of heretical books, but a refusal to abjure, or a relapse after abjuration, enabled them to hand over the heretic to the civil officers, and by these—so ran the first legal enactment of religious bloodshed which defiled our Statute Book—he was to be burnt on a high place before the people."

Henry IV's last Christmas at Eltham was a sad one. He had been attacked by a fulsome leprous disease, which had terribly disfigured his face. The sickness came on shortly after the execution of the Archbishop of York, and the people saw in it a judgment from heaven for so sacrilegious an act. It was the last Christmas of his life, that of 1412. "So complete was his seclusion, owing both to his illness and the awful disfigurement of his person, that he scarcely saw anyone but his queen, lying frequently for hours without sign of life. After Candlemas he was so much better as to be able to keep his birthday; so he was carried from Eltham to his Palace at Westminster, where he had summoned Parliament." But he died shortly after at the Jerusalem Chamber of that Palace.

Henry V was keeping his first Christmas at Eltham when he discovered a plot which caused him to cut short his visit. It was while the hall of the old palace was resounding with mirth and jollity that the ill news was conveyed to the King of a plot for his destruction, said to have been hatched by the Lollards, in which the friend and associate of his youth, Lord Cobham, was involved. The tidings so alarmed the King that he hurried from Eltham, and the Christmas feast of 1413 came to an unexpected and sudden termination. Sir Thomas Erpyngham was the Steward of the Household, a notable figure of his time, known well for his loyalty to the Lancastrian cause. Sir Thomas figured prominently at Agincourt, whence he had gone with a goodly company of men from Eltham and Greenwich, and it was by way of Eltham that the victorious army returned. Here the King stayed one night before the great procession was formed at Blackheath prior to the march into London.

“ To Canterbury full fair he past,
 And offred at Seynt Thomas shrine ;
 Fro thens sone he rod in hast,
 To Eltham he cam in good time.”

Thus sang John Lydgate to commemorate the joyful occasion. On the morrow, November 23rd, 1415, St. Clement's Day, the procession proceeded to Blackheath. Sang the old poet:

“ To ye Blackheth thanne rod he,
 And spredde ye way on every side ;
 Twenty thousand men myght well see
 Oure comely King for to abyde.

The Kynge from Eltham sone he nam,
 Hyse prisoners with hym dede brynge,
 And to ye Blake Heth ful sone he cam ;
 He saw London with oughte lesynge ;
 Heil Ryall London, seyde our King."

Henry VI spent his infancy at Eltham. He was nine years old when the news came of his father's unexpected death in France. Shakespeare alludes to this in the first act of "Henry VI." There Exeter is made to say:—

' To Eltham will I, where the young King is,
 Being ordained his special governor :
 And for his safety there I'll best devise."

It was in his old age, after his troublous reign, that Henry VI. came to Eltham again. In the Privy Council records we read that the unhappy King, then a prisoner in the Tower, was allowed to amuse himself by hunting in the Royal woods.

Edward the Fourth lived much at Eltham. Here, in the year 1469, he held a great tournament, at which his champion was Sir John Paston. He built the Great Hall and the present bridge over the moat. Edward was a great promoter of building operations. Indeed, such work was so much a distinguishing feature of his domestic policy that it found notice in a poem written on his death by John Skelton, who afterwards became a somewhat notable poet of Tudor times. It was Skelton's first published poem, and one of the verses runs thus:—

" I made Nottingham a Palace Royal,
 Windsor, Eltham, and many others mo :
 Yet at last I went from them all,
 Et nunc in pulvere dormio."

Henry VII rebuilt the west front. Lambarde refers to this, and details of the work are still preserved. Lambarde says: "It is not yet out of memorie that the King set up the fair front over the moat here." Commenting on this, J. C. Buckler, writing in 1828, says: "Henry VII, who resided much in Eltham, and, as appears by a record in the Office of Arms, most commonly dined in the great hall, rebuilt the front of the Palace next the moat—that is, the west, or principal front, which extended full three hundred and eighty feet."

One of the most notable events in Eltham history occurred in the reign of Henry VII. This was the visit paid to the Palace in the year 1500 by Erasmus, the great scholar. Erasmus made the acquaintance and ultimately became the close friend of Sir Thomas More. In one of his letters Erasmus tells how, when he was staying at Greenwich with Lord Mountjoy, More took him for a walk from Greenwich to Eltham to see the house which the King had there. It would be interesting to know which road these two wonderful men took when they made this journey. In all probability it was by way of Kidbrook Lane. When they reached the Palace they found that the Royal children were there, and among them the little Prince, Henry, who was to become king in after years, as Henry VIII. He seems to have been a very beautiful and also intelligent child, and to have impressed the mind of the distinguished visitor. Erasmus, in the letter alluded to, writes:—

"When we came to the great hall there were assembled together not only those of the Royal household, but Mountjoy's train also. In the midst stood Henry, then only nine years old, but of right royal bearing, fore-

shewing a nobility of mind, in addition to a person of singular beauty.

“On his right hand was the Lady Margaret, then about eleven years old, afterwards married to James, King of the Scots; the Lady Mary, four years old, was playing at his left; and near at hand was the little Edmund, in the nurse’s arms. More, with his companion, Arnold, saluted the youthful Henry, and proffered him something written, I know not what.

“I, not expecting anything of the kind, had nothing ready at the time to present to the Prince, but promised that I would take some other opportunity of shewing my respect to him. Meanwhile, I was a good deal vexed with More for not having forewarned me, and the more so as the stripling, during dinner, sent me a short epistle as a kind of challenge to write something to him.”

It is a satisfaction to learn that Erasmus carried out his promise, for when he reached home, he says, “I invoked the muses from whom I had long been divorced, and composed an elegant ode in Hexameters and Iambics, in praise of England, of Henry VII, and of the Princes Arthur and Henry.” It was to Henry that he dedicated his ode.

Henry VIII was often at Eltham in the early part of his reign, but afterwards he showed preference for the Palace at Greenwich, a preference which was shown by the succeeding monarchs. It was at Eltham, on the Christmas Eve of 1515, that Wolsey took the oaths of Lord Chancellor, and was created to that office in succession to Archbishop Warham. In 1516 Henry held a Chapter of the Garter here.

“In his sports, pageants, and general habits of life there was a magnificence not unmingled with a sense of

the poetical and the picturesque, which helped to endear the young King Henry to the people of England. We can well understand," writes the historian, Knight, "with what pleasure the tales must have been told and listened to of Henry's coming into London in the habit of a Yeoman of the Guard to behold the festivities of Midsummer Eve, or of his excursions into the country on May-day morning."

One of the most picturesque of chroniclers, Hall, thus describes an incident of this kind, which stands in strange and refreshing contrast to the scenes in the later years of the same King's reign:—

"The King and Queen, accompanied with many lords and ladies, rode to the high ground of Shooter's Hill to take the open air, and as they passed by the way they espied a company of tall yeomen, clothed in green, with green hoods, and bows and arrows, to the number of two hundred.

"Then one of them, which called himself Robin Hood, came to the King, desiring him to see his men shoot, and the King was content.

"Then he whistled, and all the two hundred archers shot and loosed at once; and then he whistled again, and they likewise shot again; their arrows whistled by the craft of the head, so that the noise was strange and great, and much pleased the King, the Queen, and all the company.

"All these archers were of the King's Guard, and had thus apparelled themselves to make solace to the King.

"Then Robin Hood desired the King and Queen to come into the green wood and to see how the outlaws live.

“ The King demanded of the Queen and her ladies if they durst adventure to go into the woods with so many outlaws. Then the Queen said, if it please him, she was content.

“ Then the horns blew till they came to the wood under Shooter’s Hill, and there was an arbour made with boughs, with a hall, and a great chamber, and an inner chamber, very well made, and covered with flowers and sweet herbs, which the King much praised.

“ Then said Robin Hood: ‘ Sir, outlaws’ breakfast is venison, and therefore you must be content with such fare as we use.’

“ Then the King departed and his company, and Robin Hood and his men them conducted.

“ And as they were returning there met with them two ladies in a rich chariot, drawn with five horses, and every horse had his name on his head, and on every horse sat a lady, with her name written.

“ On the first courser, called *Camde*, sat *Humiditie*, or *Humide*; on the second courser, called *Maneon*, rode Lady *Vert*; on the third, called *Pheaton*, sate Lady *Vegetave*; on the fourth, called *Rimphom*, sate Lady *Pleasance*; on the fifth, called *Lamfran*, sate *Sweet Odour*, and in the chair sat the *Lady May*, accompanied with *Lady Flora*, richly apparrelled; and they saluted the King with divers goodly songs, and so brought him to *Greenwich*.”

Both *Mary* and *Elizabeth* visited the *Palace*, but do not appear to have resided here for any length of time.

James I, being a sufferer from the gout, was recommended by his physician to bathe his foot in the

warm blood of a buck, so it is a popular tradition that he came to hunt in the Eltham woods for the cure. In his reign a Commission was appointed to survey the lands and tenements of the Manor of Eltham, and it is interesting to note that a member of the Commission was Francis Bacon.

The Palace was destroyed in the early years of the Commonwealth and the materials sold, and that was practically the end of its Royal associations.

It is impossible within the limits of a short account, such as this, to speak of the many notable men who lived and worked in this romantic neighbourhood. Vandyke, the painter, had rooms in the old Palace where he produced several of his great pictures. Here John Lilburne lived in seclusion, by the permission of Cromwell, so long as he behaved himself, and he died here a Quaker. Here Essex, the Parliamentary general, came to die. Pepys and Evelyn have both left comments upon their visits to the neighbourhood. Warham, Wolsey, More, the Ropers, Judge Wythens, Sir John Shaw, the Sherards, Dogget the Actor, Bishop Horne, and many others have lived in or have been associated with the parish.

I have omitted, on account of the limited time, all reference to the Church, the great house in the Park, now used as the Golf Club, and other features of historical or antiquarian interest; but I hope I have submitted evidence enough to convince you that you have to-day visited a remote suburb of the metropolis that may claim to have had considerable historic distinction in the past, and that there is some justification for the pride of the natives in the picturesque and romantic associations of their Royal village.

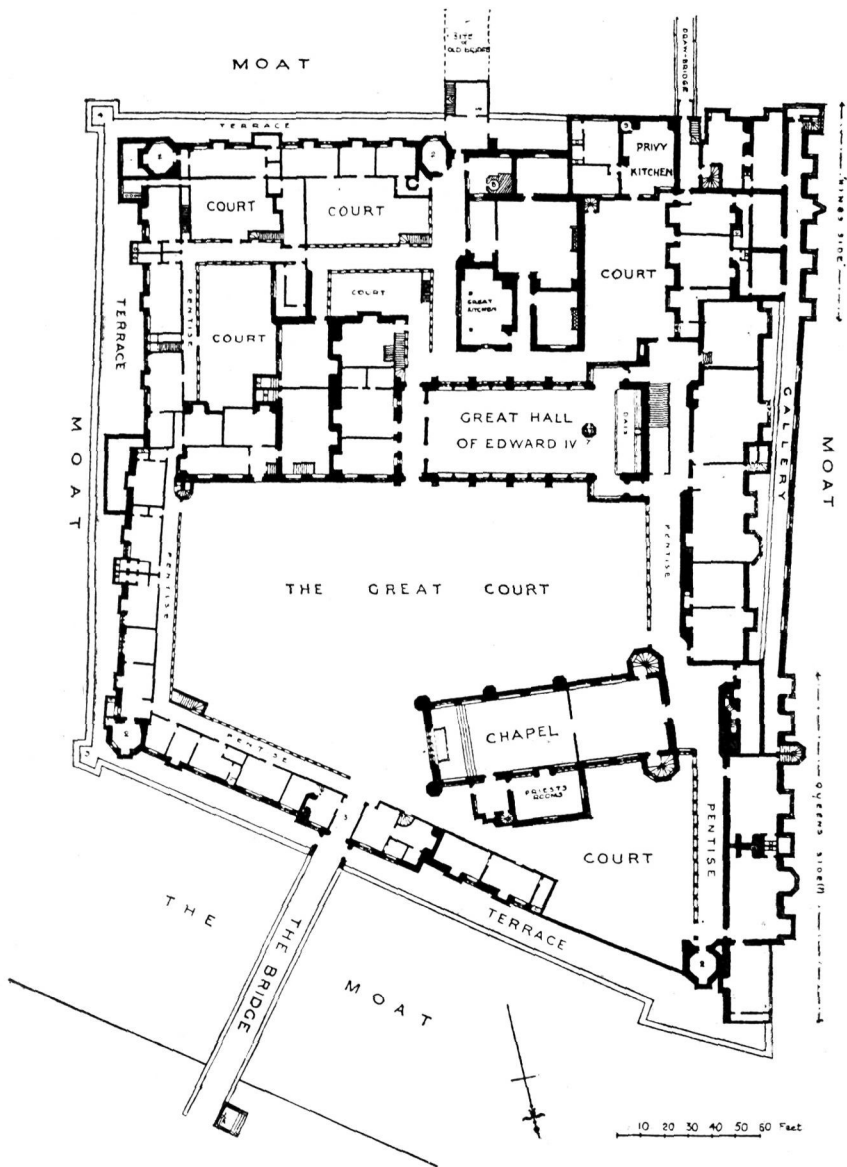
ELTHAM PALACE (1913).

Since the visit of the Society to Eltham certain developments have taken place which add considerably to the interest of the Palace. The first of these was the discovery of the Elizabethan plan which had lain hidden since the time of Elizabeth, when it was made, presumably, by John Thorpe, whose plan of the Outer or Green Court was published by Hasted and is well known to antiquaries.

Mr. Walter H. Godfrey, while making researches concerning Chelsea in connection with "The Survey of the Memorials of Greater London," accidentally came across it in the Library of Hatfield House. By the kind permission of the Marquis of Salisbury, the writer has been given access to the precious document, and a copy has been specially taken by Mr. H. G. Warren, A.R.I.B.A., which is here reproduced.

The plan sets at rest doubts that have hitherto existed as to the extent of the Palace, the position of the Chapel, the number of Courts, and many other points; and it probably dates from the later years of Queen Elizabeth's reign, when Sir Christopher Hatton was Keeper of the Parks. By the help of this new and valuable acquisition some further points may be noted.

Upon the Bridge there was a "Conduit" or water supply. It is shown very plainly upon the plan, the taps being drawn to indicate its purpose. It has long since been removed, but its junction with the walls is still visible. A great outer wall ran along the north and east sides of the Palace, and for a considerable way along the south side. Mr. A. W. Clapham, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A., an experienced archæologist, to whom the writer is in-



PLAN OF ELTHAM PALACE.
 PROBABLY BY JOHN THORPE, *temp.* ELIZABETH.

debted for much kind help in the interpretation of the plan, describes this outer wall as Tudor work, and therefore some two and a half centuries later than the work within, which is that of Bishop Bek. Portions of this wall, in a very perfect condition, are readily discernible. At the corners marked 3 and 4, were two garden turrets. Number 3 was actually in existence in 1735, when the brothers Buck made their drawing. Number 4 is still in existence, but without the roof.

Mr. Clapham thinks that the Chapel was being completed in the reign of Henry VI., for from the building accounts of that reign he finds mention of the construction of a screen and of the two staircases to the gallery above. Its position has hitherto been a matter for speculation.

A feature of the Great Court, and, indeed, of all the Courts, was the Pentise, or covered way, which ran round or along one side of them. These structures resembled very much the Cloisters one sees in the precincts of a Cathedral. The dots in the plan show the wooden pillars which supported the roof and probably rooms above. A similar structure surrounds the Court at Windsor.

Writing of the three Octagonal Towers marked 2 in the plan, Mr. Walter H. Godfrey says, in "The Architectural Review," "it would seem that the three principal towers at the angles and the one in the centre of the south front are perhaps part of the original fortifications of Anthony Beke, Bishop of Durham, or one of his predecessors who first built the surrounding wall. The last named tower evidently guarded the south entrance, and it may have been the remains of this that were

spoken of as 'Castle-like' in earlier descriptions of the ruins. Some later hand probably inserted the fireplaces in these towers, and built the apartments overhanging the original fortifications."

The draw-bridge shown on the south side was, in all probability, the private draw-bridge, which Mr. Clapham says was constructed by Henry VIII. It led across the moat to a concealed pathway leading to the King's Garden.

The lower portions of the Bays of the west front shown upon the plan are still discernible from the moat on the west side. This front, according to Lambarde, was erected by Henry VII. Mr. Clapham places the King's side at the southern end, and the Queen's side was probably at the opposite end, but there is some uncertainty about this.

The Great Kitchen is shown near to the Great Hall, and beyond it is an oven, marked (8). The position of the fireplace of the King's private kitchen is still shown in the wall bounding the gardens of the Palace. The figure 9 marks the oven of the King's Kitchen.

Mr. Godfrey seems to think that the Terraces may have been constructed in Queen Elizabeth's time, as a large sum was spent upon building at that period.

During the last two years the Office of Works have taken steps to arrest the decay of what is still left to us of the old Palace. The handsome bridge was found to be unsafe and has been thoroughly repaired and made secure. The work has been well done, and the several courses of bricks which it was found necessary to insert are composed of bricks taken from a very old wall a few hundred yards from the Palace.

The Great Hall was found to be in a dangerous condition, the effect, mainly, of the weather, which found an easy entrance through the open windows and bays. Where necessary, the windows have been provided with new mullions, and glazed, as also have been the two bays. The south bay has been completely restored.

The roof, too, has undergone a thorough examination, and at the present moment the workmen are engaged in putting it into repair.