

HUNTERCOMBE MANOR, BURNHAM.

On the recent sale of this interesting old place, of garden fame, consequent upon the death of the Hon. Mrs. Boyle, who had long been its owner and occupier, and, to a great extent, its maker, a few notes may be not inappropriate. Mrs. Boyle wrote upon gardens, from an artist's point of view, under the initials E. V. B. She was Eleanor Vere Gordon, daughter of the late Alex. Gordon, of Ellon Castle, Aberdeen, her mother being Albinia, daughter of Rich. Cumberland by his marriage with Lady Albinia Hobart, daughter of the third Earl of Buckinghamshire.* She married in 1845 the Rev. the Hon. Richard Cavendish Boyle, fifth son of the eighth Earl of Cork. In 1871 Mr. Boyle bought Huntercombe. He died in 1886.

In "Days and Hours in a Garden," 1884, E. V. B. described this as "an old place without a history." Jane Porter † wrote in 1826: This was originally the residence of the Prioress of the Benedictine house which stands a stone's throw away, ‡ and this seems not improbable. In "Days and Hours" we read: "All we know is that, since taking possession, wherever a hole is dug to plant a tree the spade is sure to strike some old brick foundation. . . ." Also: "There were signs of an upstairs room having been used as a chapel; a piscina in a wall and a narrow lancet window having been found and destroyed when the house was in the builder's hands (1873). Broken arches and mouldings in chalk and stone were dug up." The expert surveyors of the Royal Commission reported: "The original house was built in the 14th century, and then consisted of the present Hall with the Screens and a kitchen wing at the west end and a Solar wing at the east end. . . . The solar wing

* Scotsman, Aug. 21, 1916. † Tales round a Winter Hearth.
‡ Burnham Abbey, a small house of Augustinian Canonesses (RECORDS VIII., 571).



HUNTERCOMBE MANOR: THE HALL.



HUNTERCOMBE MANOR: THE EVELYN ROOM.

was rebuilt, and extended towards the north at the end of the 17th century." George Evelyn would seem to have been the builder of the late 17th century portions, and his initials in plaster appear in the ceiling of the room called the Evelyn Room (Plate II.). His more famous cousin John visited it and described it in his "Diary" as a pretty seate in the Forest. After the Evelyns' residence here it was let as a farm, and all traces of the old gardens, which also seem to have been famed in those days, disappeared. Although it is to its gardens that the modern fame of Huntercombe is mainly due, the house itself is full of charm, as will appear by the two views we give. Other rooms are beautifully fitted, and the furnishing by the Boyles full of culture and refinement.

Our Society visited the gardens here in 1914. *Country Life* illustrated them (May 6, 1899). They were commonly spoken of as charming "old" gardens, though they date really from 1871. But it would be hard to find in a flat country any old gardens of greater charm than these, of which all the credit is due to Mr. and Mrs. Boyle and "a skilful gardener possessed of common sense and uncommon good taste." One thing, however, they did find here, which was invaluable in effect and beyond the skill of the ablest gardener to supply, namely, many noble timber trees, chiefly elm, far enough removed from the house not to rob the garden, but near enough to form a grand background to it.