

THE MANOR OF CHEQUERS.

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THE MANOR of Chequers, or Chakers, derived its name from one of its early possessors, John Chakers de Seacariis (of the Exchequer), during whose time (in the reign of King John) the house was assigned as the place of deposit of treasure belonging to the King's Court, and from whose family it passed, by the marriages of its many heiresses, into the possession successively of the families of Hawtrey, Croke, Thurbane, Cutts, Revett, and Russell. On the death, in 1836, of Sir Robert Greenhill Russell, Bart., the Russells of Chequers became extinct, and the estate passed by will to Sir Robert Frankland, Bart., of Thirkleby Park, in Yorkshire, whose great-great-grandmother, Elizabeth Lady Frankland, was sister of John Russell, third son of Sir John Russell, Bart., of Chippenham, by Frances, youngest daughter of Oliver Cromwell, who married, in 1715, Joanna, daughter and heir of John Thurbane, of Chequers. Sir Robert Frankland assumed the surname of Russell on his succession, and devised the estate to his widow, Louisa Ann, Lady Frankland Russell (third daughter of the Right Rev. Lord George Murray, Bishop of St. David's) (Atholl), at whose decease, in 1871, Chequers passed into the possession of her fifth daughter, Rosalind Alicia, widow of Francis L'Estrange Astley, third son of Sir Jacob Henry Astley, Bart., of Melton Constable, Norfolk, and Seaton Delaval, Northumberland, and brother of Jacob, Lord Hastings. By the will of her mother, Mrs. Astley assumed the surnames of Frankland Russell, in addition to and before that of Astley. The present building probably stands upon the same spot as the foundation of 1326, which, however, was not the first erection; nothing now remains of the original building, and the present structure, which has been altered and added to by the various possessors, appears to have been erected at the

end of the fifteenth century, and to have consisted of a centre with two wings projecting southwards at right angles to it, and connected by a high wall, forming a court of honour. The portions of this building now existing are the north and east fronts, which were, however, altered, or rather redecorated, by Sir William Hawtrey. Upon the Italianised stone battlements above the bay window of the drawing-room are carved the crest of Hawtrey—a griffin on a haw-tree; the initials "A. H." and "W. H.," with the date 1565, and in the angles chequered shields; over the centre of the library bay window is carved a shield charged with an eagle, displayed with two heads, being the arms of Croke. It appears from an old map of the estate and house, bearing date 1629, that the mansion then consisted of two separate buildings, facing north and south, and running parallel to each other, and that stables with other out-buildings were attached to the east corner of the southern portion of the building. No west or east wings are shown in the map, the draughtsman having curiously introduced a front elevation, which interferes somewhat with a proper ground-plan; but it is almost certain that the east wing is of the same date as the north front, evidence of which may be detected in the age of its wooden beams, its doors, and bricks. The west wing was altered, if not rebuilt, at the latter end of the eighteenth century by Sir George Russell, who also considerably altered the south front, shown in the map of 1629. The mansion, which was of Elizabethan architecture, and of red brick, was then covered with stucco, and the simple triangular shaped gables were cut into battlements and decorated with pinnacles. A small wing, with a clock tower, was added by Lady Frankland Russell, at the south-west corner of the building. In 1566 Lady Mary Grey, sister to the unfortunate Lady Jane Grey, was, after her marriage with Thomas Keyes, committed by Queen Elizabeth to the custody of Sir William Hawtrey, and remained a prisoner at Chequers for a considerable time. Letters written from Chequers by Lady Mary are preserved in the British Museum, and interesting accounts of her incarceration are given by Miss Strickland in her "Lives of the Tudor Princesses" (p. 257), and by Burgon in his "Life of Sir Thomas Gresham." The

house contains a number of family and historical portraits, and an interesting collection of Cromwellian relics, brought to Chequers, owing to the marriage of its heiress, Miss Joanna Thurbane, with John Russell, of Chippenham, the protector's grandson. In the garden on the south side of the building is an ancient elm, twenty-eight feet in circumference, said to have been planted by King Stephen, and about three hundred yards north-west of the mansion is the ancient labyrinth or maze. The park, which is five hundred and sixty acres in extent, lies principally to the west of the house, and is celebrated for the great beauty of its scenery, and its wonderful box woods, which are supposed to be the finest in England. At the foot of the western slope of Beacon Hill is the famous Velvet Lawn, close to which is an ancient fortification, where it is said an action was fought between the Romans and the two sons of Cymbelinus, in which one of the sons was slain.