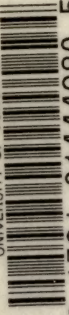


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THE ENGLISH
STAIRCASE

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COLESHILL, BERKSHIRE (1650), (INIGO JONES, ARCHITECT).

111

THE ENGLISH STAIRCASE

AN HISTORICAL ACCOUNT OF ITS
CHARACTERISTIC TYPES TO THE
END OF THE XVIIITH CENTURY

BY

WALTER H. GODFREY

Architect, Author of

“THE LIFE AND WORK OF GEORGE DEVEY,”
and “THE PARISH OF CHELSEA.”

Illustrated from Photographs by HORACE DAN, &c.,
and from Measured Drawings and Sketches.

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PREFACE.

NO one will dispute the importance, from an architectural point of view, of the position which the staircase holds in the general design of the house. Yet it is curious that in the decline of Domestic Architecture which took place in the last century, the staircase reached perhaps a lower level than any other individual feature. Turned mahogany newels of fantastic form with mean and starved balusters of varnished pitchpine became the constant companion of steep flights of steps which turned in a well, carefully excluded from the light! Indeed the familiar sight of these unlovely stairways had all but banished from the public mind any memory of the broad stairs of our forefathers, with their easy rise, their fine proportions and well-lighted situation.

Whether we turn to the wide and simple well-stairs of Elizabeth's reign, or to the richly carved examples of James I, or whether we consider the massive balustrades of Charles II, the dignified designs of Sir Christopher Wren, or the graceful lines of the Georgian period, we cannot fail to see how varied and yet how beautiful can be the methods of treating this central feature of the house. The distorted products of the modern joiner's shop would, one is confident, disappear with a wider knowledge of earlier methods.

It is the object of this book to place before the reader a connected and continuous illustration of the principal types used in England and Scotland until the end of the eighteenth century, irrespective of the size of the building of which they form a part. The author has not attempted an exhaustive treatise, and many of the fine and well-known examples have been omitted to make way for subjects taken from houses that are not readily accessible to the student or the public. The purpose throughout has been to read, into the ancient forms of the models still left to us, all the beauty and interest of the ideals of architecture which obtained in the past centuries, and from such a study nothing but good can come.

In the series of which this book is one the interpretation of the broad lessons of style is made by means of special details, and in this the appeal is as much to the general reader as to the trained architect. To borrow a mathematical simile, the selection of a single feature like the staircase as the "constant" in the architectural formulæ, enables the variations of style to be discovered all the more readily.

In the first place special thanks are due to the owners of various houses mentioned in this volume for allowing the photographs and drawings to be made, the reproductions of which form the chief feature of the book.

Mention must next be made of Mr. Dan's important share in providing the greater number of the photographic illustrations. Many of those for which he is responsible have been brought to light by him.

My grateful acknowledgments are due to the following ladies and gentlemen for the use of their sketches or photographs: Mr. A. Whitford Anderson, Mr. J. Starkie Gardner, F.S.A., Mrs. Ernest Godman, Mr. Albert Halliday, Mr. R. S. Lorimer, Mr. W. G. MacDowell, Mr. Ernest A. Mann, Mr. J. E. Mowlem, Mr. Baily S. Murphy, Mr. W. Niven, F.S.A., Mr. C. H. Potter, Mr. A. E. Richardson, Mr. Arthur Stratton, and Mr. S. H. Wratten. I am further indebted to the Marquis of Salisbury for leave to publish the plan from the Hatfield papers which I have been able to identify as one of the schemes for rebuilding Chelsea House; to Mr. A. F. G. Leveson-Gower, F.S.A., for permission to use the drawing, in his possession, of 8, Grosvenor Square, and to the proprietors of the *Connoisseur*, for the loan of the block of Stoke Edith. Messrs. W. H. Smith and Son have supplied the photograph of Hatfield. I also have to acknowledge the assistance rendered by Mr. Edmund L. Wratten, who has prepared the majority of the drawings found in the text.

Lastly, my thanks are due to my publishers, who have been more than helpful throughout the whole production of the volume.

WALTER H. GODFREY.

11 CARTERET STREET,
QUEEN ANNE'S GATE, S.W.,
December, 1910.

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THE ENGLISH STAIRCASE.

THE part played by the staircase in the history of domestic architecture is a very prominent one, not only because it is necessarily the key to a large part of the planning of a house, but because it performs a continual and public function, and as such, is the proper subject for dignified and even ambitious treatment. It was not until the renaissance had taken a firm hold upon English life, in the sixteenth century, that there occurred a development in house planning and building in any way comparable with the ecclesiastical triumphs of the four preceding centuries. It will be found therefore that the main body of the examples described in this book belongs to the period between the years 1500 and 1800, during which domestic architecture in England discovered a very fine and thoroughly native expression, despite the foreign influences which provided a strong stimulus from time to time.

It must not be thought, however, that within these three hundred years any continued development can be traced from some early and crude form to the polished and graceful types of the latter part of the eighteenth century. Architecture, being the most closely allied, among the arts, to man's common needs, and also to his greatest ideals, follows his psychological moods, and is too dependent

2 THE NATURE OF ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENT.

upon national and political events to proceed upon the even path of an ordered progress. The Greek genius for beauty was succeeded by the Roman virile construction. The great church architecture of France and England rose on the ruins of their forerunners' achievement with but a lingering reminiscence of the glories of either. And yet again the builders of the renaissance learned to scorn the sublime structures of the Gothic artists. And even if the story of each single period is told, we still find that architecture does not deign to lend herself to the vanity of those who believe that each age is an advance upon its predecessor, but choosing the right moment and the right place she springs to maturity and beauty only to languish in the succeeding years, when the craftsman is most confident of his skill. So we see the perfection of the Greek ideal in the fourth century, B.C., and the most exquisite grace of the Gothic form in the thirteenth century of our own era.

It is important that this should be recognised at the outset, for in the study of a single feature like the staircase, we may see mirrored, as it were, the various influences that were at work in the formation of successive styles of architecture, and the chief interest in such a study, apart from the intrinsic beauty of each example, lies in the relationship which these styles bear to one another. For the appeal of the single example is to the uncertain taste of the chance onlooker, but its historical interest is abiding, and from this we have all much to learn.

In approaching the subject before us from this standpoint we shall feel that the Elizabethan period gave us a type of domestic architecture which must live for all time. Freed from the necessities of church building, not only by the number of the churches but by the silence of the dissolved monasteries, which until then had never ceased to call the people to build for them, and filled

with enthusiasm for the new and enticing ideals of the renaissance, the builders of that day turned their thoughts to the architecture of the home and to buildings for the accommodation of civic and commercial life. In this they were amazingly successful, and along with the invention of a plan, which with very slight modifications is perfectly suited to the present time, they designed the many domestic features which are indispensable to the complete dwelling-house, and set an enduring quality upon their artistic treatment of them. Among these features was the staircase. The new movement, too, found fresh and amplified uses for the old materials of building. The Gothic period of church and cathedral design was essentially a period of mason craft, it produced an architecture planned, wrought and adorned by the mason. Incidentally the carpenter did great things, and produced the roofs of Westminster and Eltham or carved the screens and stalls of a cathedral choir. But the Elizabethan period was to produce the joiner and it gave him the opportunity and incentive to carry his craft to perfection. With the advent of the panelled room, the carved overmantel, and the beautiful panelled screens and roofs came the triumph of the joiner—the staircase, which donned a more domestic and a richer quality by the change of its material from stone to wood.

We do not think too much emphasis can be laid upon the spontaneity of the birth of a new style in any department of art, and upon its relative superiority when in its nascent state, for art is not a product of evolution but is, in all its greatest phases, totally opposed to it. Yet we cannot altogether overlook what went before, even if we regard it as rather the material of which the new style makes some use, than as the direct cause of the change itself. The directing force that turned men's thoughts to the fuller development of domestic life, was without doubt that great European

movement which we know as the renaissance. But the movement had begun to make its influence known many a year before it



Fig. 1. STAIR TO THE DORMITORY, HEXHAM PRIORY.

brought to flower, in England, the arts of architecture, literature, and the drama. The fifteenth century had already felt the coming change of ideals, the essential genius of the art we call Gothic was becoming weakened; but the new movement was not at first strong enough to create its own style, and as yet wrapped itself round with garments of Gothic form. Thus, under the ægis of the church, a by no means unimportant

type of domestic architecture had been developed before the middle of the sixteenth century. Monastic life required a large establishment apart from the church buildings proper, and the royal custom of lodging ambassadors and other persons of eminence in the greater monasteries, was either the effect or the cause of the most elaborate domestic arrangements, both in the communal apartments

and in the abbot's rooms. The monasteries became the hotels of that age, and as they were the schools for ecclesiastical architecture, so they afforded the first models of the homes that sprang up immediately before and after their dissolution.

At this time there were two strikingly different types of staircase which served two entirely different purposes. The one, a plain straight flight of stone steps between two walls, was employed wherever it was in the daily use of a large number of people. The other, a circular or "newel" stair, formed generally of winding steps of stone that circled about the centre newel within a small well, was placed wherever required for occasional use, or where economy of space was specially desired. The straight flight would be found leading to the refectory or dining-hall whenever this was upon the first floor as may be seen in the Vicars' Close at Wells, and in the south transept of

Hexham Priory, where the stairway to the canons' dormitory anticipates the later balustrades with its fine wall and stepped parapet (Figure 1). Another well-known monastic example is the Norman stair (circa 1085) to the Strangers' Hall at Canter-

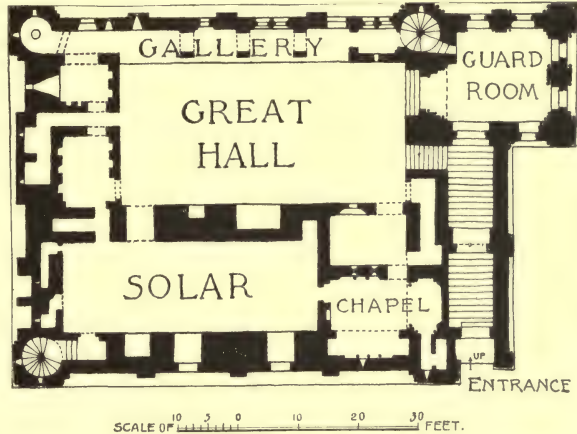


Fig. 2. CASTLE RISING, NORFOLK.

bury, which is protected by an arcaded porch of which the arches diminish as the stairs ascend. In the Norman military archi-

ture there was seldom room for the straight internal flight, save in very narrow tunnels in the thickness of the walls, but the fine example from Castle Rising (Figures 2 and 3) is an exception to the rule. In other Norman keeps like Castle Hedingham the first floor

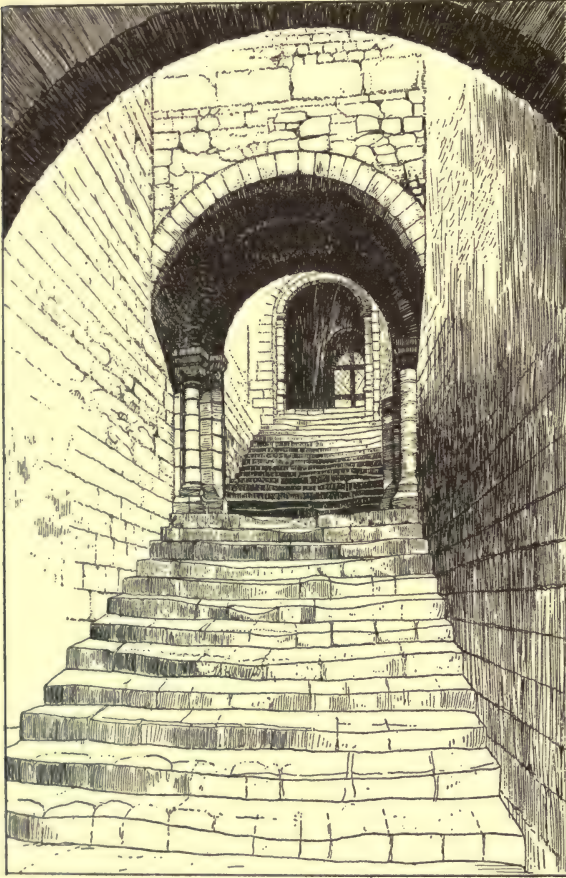


Fig. 3. CASTLE RISING, NORFOLK.

Drawn by E. L. Wratten.

was approached by external stairs in one flight, and this custom continued for many years. At the beautiful moated house at Stokesay in Shropshire, built in the thirteenth century the room at the upper end of the great hall is reached by an external stair, and there are still indications of the original roof that covered it. At the lower end of this hall is a straight flight of solid oak stairs, carried on bold wooden brackets from the wall. This may well be contemporary with the building,

or but very little later, and represents the time when the carpenter often imitated stone construction before the days of joinery.

Of the other type—the newel stair, there still exist innumerable examples, and there is nothing more striking in the plan of a mediæval building than the number of these small stairs dispersed in all directions. For churches and military buildings they were admirably fitted, for they occupied the minimum of space, and often by projecting from the face of the building, formed a convenient buttress or place of observation, the artistic possibilities of which were quickly seen by the Gothic and later builders. Thus we have the four angle turrets to the Norman keeps, the flanking turrets to the Tudor gate-houses, the picturesque staircase projection to many a church tower, and finally the constant display of these same features in the Elizabethan house. The reason for the retention of the small newel stair, and for its frequency in the last named building is a very simple one. The Elizabethan designers were unaccustomed to the passage or corridor, and not till the beginning of the seventeenth century do we see in one of John Thorpe's plans, a passage which he calls a "longe entry throughe all." In place of the passage, the rooms were all made to communicate with one another, as is usual on the continent to-day; and this necessitated a number of small stairs for access to various parts of the upper floor, when any of the doors between the apartments were locked, and approach from the main staircase prevented. This solution of the problem was no doubt in favour with designers who seemed never to lose an opportunity of traversing the low proportions of their main façades with the bold but grace-giving vertical lines of the oriel or bay window and the external stacks of chimneys.

The newel stair had no development in England at all comparable with that which took place in France, where it attained magnificent proportions and required the most elaborate stone-vaulting for its construction. With a very few exceptions it re-

mained here a stair of secondary importance, save in small buildings, and where the exigencies of space forbade a more liberal provision. The circular stair at Hedingham Castle (Figure 4) was over eleven



Fig. 4. CASTLE HEDINGHAM, ESSEX.

Drawn by Mrs. E. Godman, from a sketch by C. C. Brewer.

feet in diameter, and this, though unusually large is fairly typical in its form. The steps were generally of stone and in one length, tapering towards the centre, where they were shaped into the circular projections which, placed one over the other, formed the newel. Sometimes the steps were solid blocks of wood (like the stair already described at Stokesay), and were either built up in the same manner as the stone ones, or tenoned into a long central post. Others were of brick, as at Kirby Muxloe Castle, Leicestershire (circa 1480), carried on a continuous spiral brick vault. These turret staircases were generally carried above the roof to form

a feature on the sky-line, and occasionally they were vaulted with the help of the newel as in the charming example at Linlithgow Palace, Scotland (Figure 5).

A reference to the plan of Eastbury Manor House at Barking (Figure 6), built in 1572, will show how a small house sometimes depended entirely on the circular staircase. This little plan is a model of convenience in a small compass, and is charmingly devised for external effect, the two staircases rising in bold turrets each side of the great chimney stack. The stairs are housed into centre posts, and in one a hand-rail is ingeniously carved in the brickwork, as in another example at Tattershall Castle in Lincolnshire (circa 1440) where it is carved in stones built into the brick wall.

In reviewing the Gothic period, including the Norman that went before it and the Tudor work that followed it, we may say that as a rule the staircase took a simple form, almost invariably in stone, and that the English builders did not choose it as the subject for the elaborate adornment which they bestowed so generously upon other features. That they were ignorant of its possibilities is not conceivable, and we have only to turn to Rouen



Fig. 5. LINLITHGOW PALACE.

to see two exquisite examples of what our neighbours could do, in the Cathedral and in the Church of St. Maclou where the delicately pierced and panelled balustrade, the double flight of steps, and the spiral stone casing, show how well the later forms might have been employed in Gothic building. One curious piece of wooden balustrading, pierced with trefoiled openings is to be found in England at Downholland Hall near Ormskirk (Plate ii).

The second half of the sixteenth century saw the introduction of the new wooden type of staircase into all houses of importance in the country. The use of thin boards (the "treads" and "risers") for the formation of the steps, in place of the solid blocks of stone

and wood, allowed a lighter construction and dispensed with the necessity for the support of two parallel walls. The stairs themselves were let into long wooden bearers, called "strings," set to the slope of the stairway on both sides. The strings were framed into posts called "newels," which supported the whole framework, and allowed the designer to break the staircase into as many

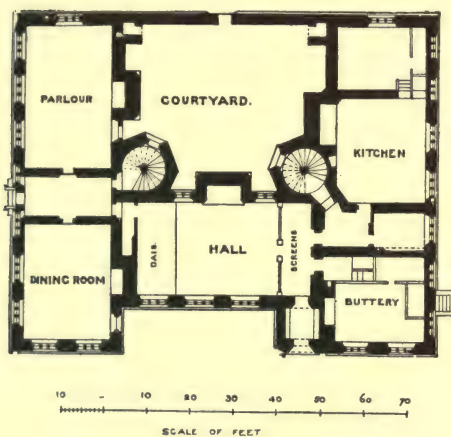


Fig. 6. EASTBURY MANOR HOUSE,
BARKING.

flights as he desired, to interpose landings, and to lead the steps round an open "well," or to double them back alongside the lower flight in the manner known as the "dog-legged" stair. It was then necessary to provide a handrail and some form of balustrade between the newels, for safety, and this completed the material for

the design. It is in the forms of these several features that the changes of style described in the succeeding pages will be noticed.

No portion of the staircase escaped the influence of these changes in style, but their characteristics are most faithfully and consistently shown in the method of filling the balustrade, and this provides the simplest basis for classification. In Elizabeth's reign two fashions were in vogue, and it is difficult to say whether they were simultaneously introduced or not. The one, which was most popular, was effected by turned balusters; the other, almost exclusively followed in the later Jacobean work, made use of dwarf pilasters, of flat section that tapered towards their base, a type of ornament seen in extraordinary profusion and in every kind of design of the early seven-



Fig. 7. CHETHAM'S HOSPITAL, MANCHESTER.

teenth century. Another form, sparingly used, is apparently found as early as either. It partakes somewhat of the nature of both kinds and might, conceivably, be a link between them, indicating that one had developed from the other. It is shown in the stair at Oakwell Hall—built in 1583—(Plate iii) where it is the silhouette of a baluster cut from a flat board, and in that at Chetham's Hospital, Manchester (Figure 7) where it is a similar outline of a pilaster. In all such cases this flat baluster is pierced, a form of ornamentation that occurs in the pilaster proper, at Claverton, Dorfold (Figures 19, 22) and elsewhere. There is a good example of the Chetham type at Boleyn Castle, East Ham.

The turned baluster, once introduced, has held its own, with varying popularity until the present day, but it is not difficult to differentiate the examples of the various periods. The Elizabethan baluster is large, from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, and is not much cut away, thus giving a certain uniformity of substance throughout the length. On the other hand, no opportunity is lost to give it interest, and it is not only "busy" with features, but is further decorated with incised lines or grooves cut round its main parts.

The examples given in this book will show what is meant if the reader will turn to the stairs at Goldsborough Hall (Figure 8), Great Kew (1599 (Plate iv), Restoration House, Rochester (Plate v), Bromley Palace* (Fig. 28), Ightham Mote and Hall i' th' Wood (Figure 29). The drum-shaped base to the balusters from Hall i' th' Wood and Bromley, is of very frequent occurrence, and the chamfered or notched angles where the square ends adjoin the part that is "turned" are an almost invariable sign of early date.

The newly discovered art of turning was evidently dear to the heart of the Elizabethan joiner, and he began to turn his newels as

* Practically the same detail as at Boleyn Castle.

GOLDSBORO'
HALL · YORKS:

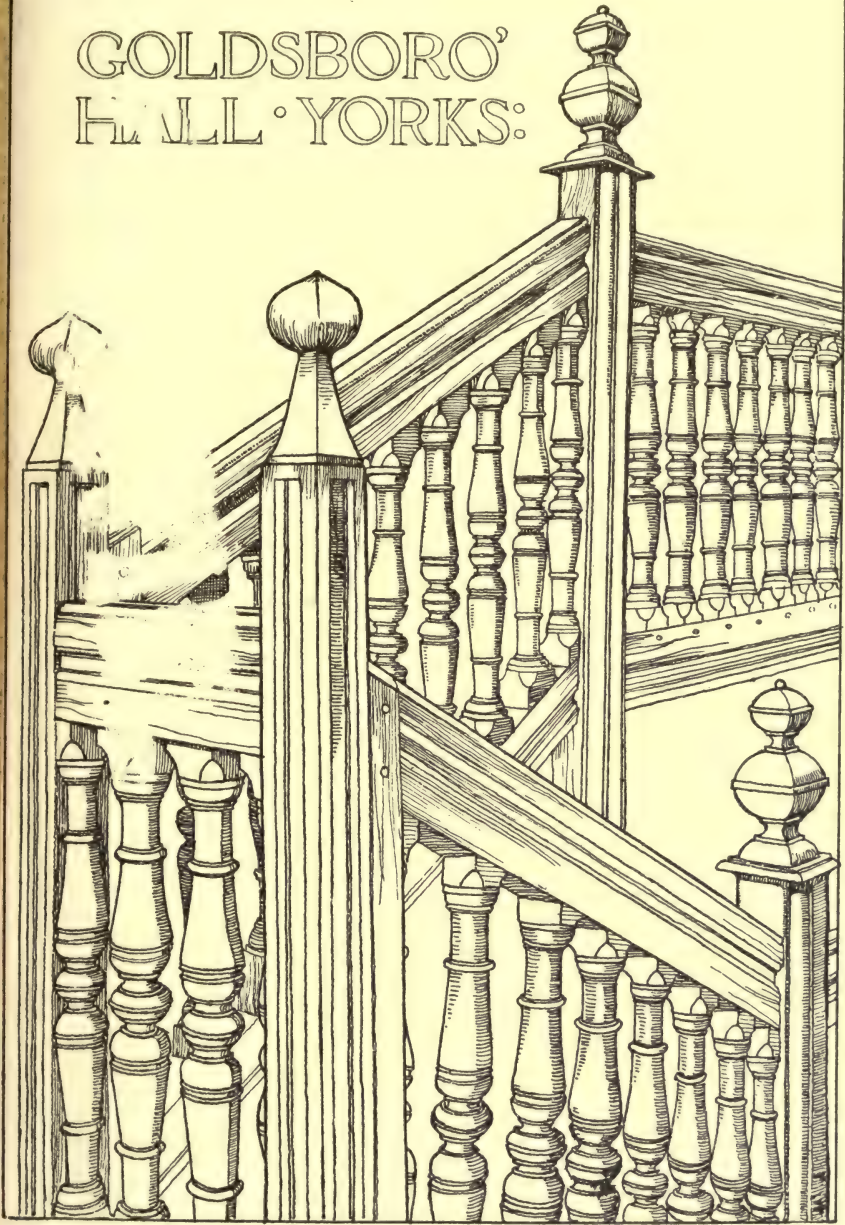


Fig. 8.

well as his balusters; but soon, guided by his better judgment, he confined the work of his lathe to the finials and pendants, which form so important a part of the general design, giving point to every rise and fall in the varying flights of the steps. Turned newels are to be seen at Holland House (2nd stair), Ordsall Hall, Salford (which has in the principal newel an elaborately carved and turned column with an Ionic cap), Hall i' th' Wood, Bolton (Figure 27), and Great Ellingham Hall, Norfolk (Figure 9). Staircases with pierced balusters seem often to have had newels framed on the same model, as at Chetham's Hospital, where the outline—rather

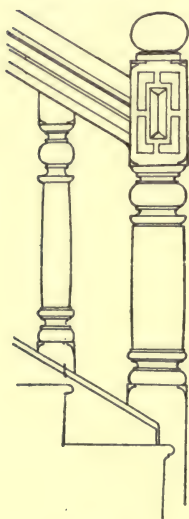


Fig. 9.
GREAT
ELLINGHAM HALL,
NORFOLK.

awkwardly—follows the rake of the stair (Figure 7). With this should be compared the newel at Claverton which has the pierced pilaster applied to each face (Figure 19). With these and a few other* exceptions newels will be found invariably square until the entirely new fashions introduced after the reign of Queen Anne.

The Elizabethan stair was a stair of many flights. We have already remarked that the long succession of stone steps found in the Gothic period had been abandoned, and the sweeping staircase of the later years of the seventeenth century was the first to try a somewhat similar effect with wood. The John Thorpe, and the Smithson collection of contemporary plans (covering a period some twenty-five years before and after 1600) show the stairs designed as “dog-legged,” and “well” staircases arranged in short flights divided by many landings. This involved a large number of stout square newels,

* Godinton has its upper newels carved in the shape of a square column or pilaster.

the effect of which can be seen in the views of Goldsborough Hall (Figure 8), Park Hall, Oswestry (Figure 26), Aston Hall (Plate xix), Crewe Hall (Figure 30), and indeed in most of the examples given. The Great Hall was still, during this period, the chief living room, and a position for the staircase had to be found elsewhere. There were exceptions to this, chiefly it seems in Yorkshire, where many houses have the main stair leading from the Hall to a passage over the Screen,* as at Methley Hall, but the

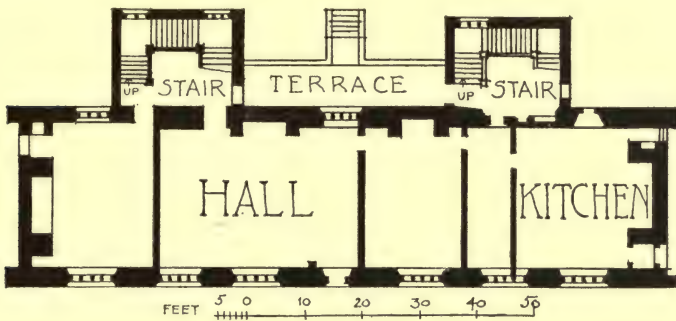


Fig. 10. ASTONBURY, HERTFORDSHIRE.

more usual method is shown in the plan of Astonbury, Herts (Figure 10) and the interesting plan of Chelsea House (Figure 11), which shows one of Sir Robert Cecil's schemes for rebuilding the old mansion of Sir Thomas More. Here the confined spaces allotted to the stairs made it impossible to arrange the steps in one long flight, and to the many flights thus occasioned is due much of

* For the information of readers who are not acquainted with the mediæval plan it may be noted that the invariable arrangement of the principal apartment or Hall during the greater part of the thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was to have the main entrance in the side wall at the *lower* end, close by the doors leading to the kitchen, etc., all of which were veiled from the upper end (with its dais, oriel, etc.) by an elaborate screen that stretched across the entire width of the Hall. (See Fig. 6.)

the impressive character which the Elizabethan designers were able to effect by means of the elaborate finials and sculptured figures with which they adorned the newels.

The earliest finials were of very simple form, a circular* or acorn-shaped† ball being used with a small moulded base, and one or more

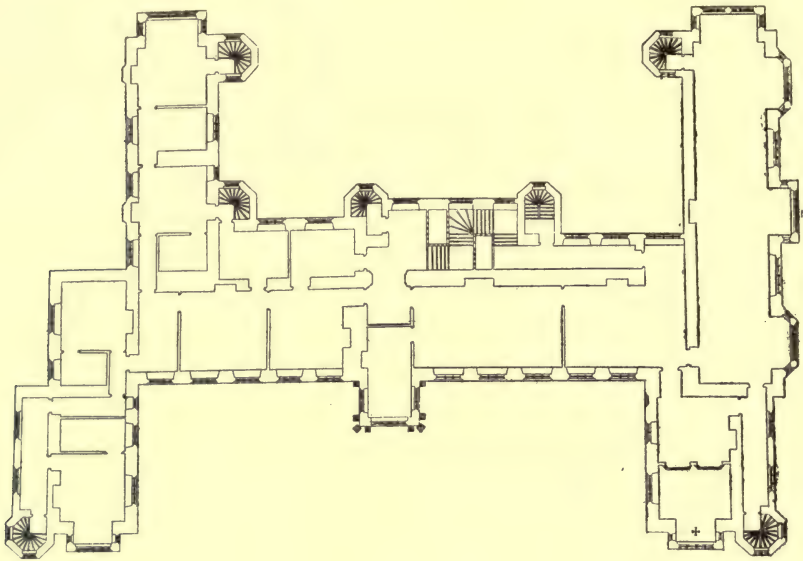


Fig. II. SIR ROBERT CECIL'S PLAN FOR THE REBUILDING OF CHELSEA HOUSE (C. 1590). FIRST FLOOR.

lines incised around its surface. The turned ball-finial, on account of its simplicity is to be found in staircases of all periods, but the earlier examples can be recognised by their small circular base, incised lines, and the fact that they are often not a perfect sphere (as at

* Laindon Hall, Essex, and Holland House (second stair).

† Eastgate House, Rochester, 1595.

Great Ellingham Hall (Figure 9), and Castle House, Deddington (Plate xvii). Curious finials elaborately turned are used at Ightham Mote, and Hall i' th' Wood (Figure 27), where they form part of the turned newels already mentioned. The best finials approximate to vases in shape, and indeed this was clearly the underlying idea in many an exercise in turning, as at Scole Inn (Fig. 27). The theory of the vase-*motif* is strengthened, too, by the subsequent general use of elaborately carved vases as finials in the middle of the seventeenth century. Great Kewlands (Plate iv) shows a very effective octagonal top to the newel, and a house at Langley, in Kent, furnishes another example of this picturesque type (Figure 12). From this to the square was not a long step, and the "square-turned" finial, shown in its infancy on the upper stair at Restoration House, Rochester (Plate v), and in a more elaborate form at Maidstone (Figure 13), became the standard type, as most in harmony with the square solidity of the newel itself.

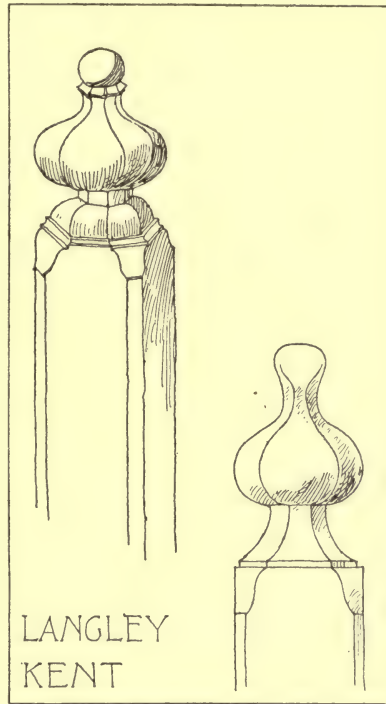


Fig. 12. LANGLEY, KENT.

The somewhat clumsy repetition of features on what is really a square-turned newel at the Commandery, Worcester (Plate vii) is in marked contrast to the two beautiful and simple shapes that cap the newels at Goldsborough Hall (Figure 8).

The existence of a finial presupposes a pendant beneath the newel,

and the two followed much the same lines, as at Yatton Kennell (Fig. 27) and at Bromley (Fig. 28). The pendant or drop was not un-

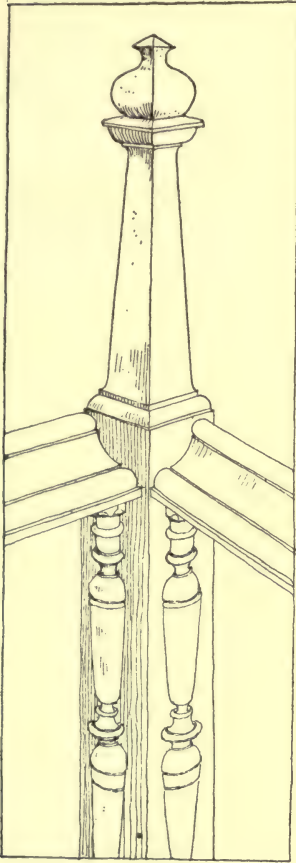


Fig. 13.

THE ARCHBISHOP'S PALACE,
MAIDSTONE.

known before its introduction into the staircase, for it had been used in the gables of timber-built houses where it was often most elaborate. Between each newel the early strings were generally quite plain, with perhaps a simple moulded capping on which the balusters could rest. At Rothamsted the string is moulded something in the same manner as the fascia-board to a Gothic gable, and at Astonbury (Figure 14) it was, till lately, enriched with painting which may well have been a copy of the original design. Above the balusters, the Elizabethan handrail was formed out of a stout oak beam, of a section deeper than its width, well moulded or grooved, and either flat at the top as at Goldsborough Hall, or more usually finished with a bold roll for the hand to grasp as at the Star Inn, Lewes (Fig. 27), and Park Hall, Oswestry (Fig. 28). Much variety was possible in the design of the handrail which gradually assumed the flat broad section in use at the end of the seventeenth century, and even as early a witness as one of the

John Thorpe drawings gives us a "rayle for a stayre" which approximates to that in vogue at the later date.

Throughout the sixteenth century, while the changes which we have related were taking place, there were remarkably few exceptions to the general adoption of the wood-framed staircase. At Burghley House, Northamptonshire, there is a stone-vaulted staircase (circa 1556) of considerable size, which runs either side of a solid block of masonry, of a width sufficient to take the five treads which



Fig. 14. ASTONBURY, HERTFORDSHIRE.

join the two flights. At Hardwick (1576) there is a very severe but imposing stone stair the walls of which are hung with tapestry, and a stone staircase is to be found at Montacute. In Scotland, which has often been in so much closer touch with the architectural influence of France, than of England, there is the finest example of the stone "newel" stair, brought to a considerable pitch of dignity

A STAIRCASE VAULTED IN STONE.

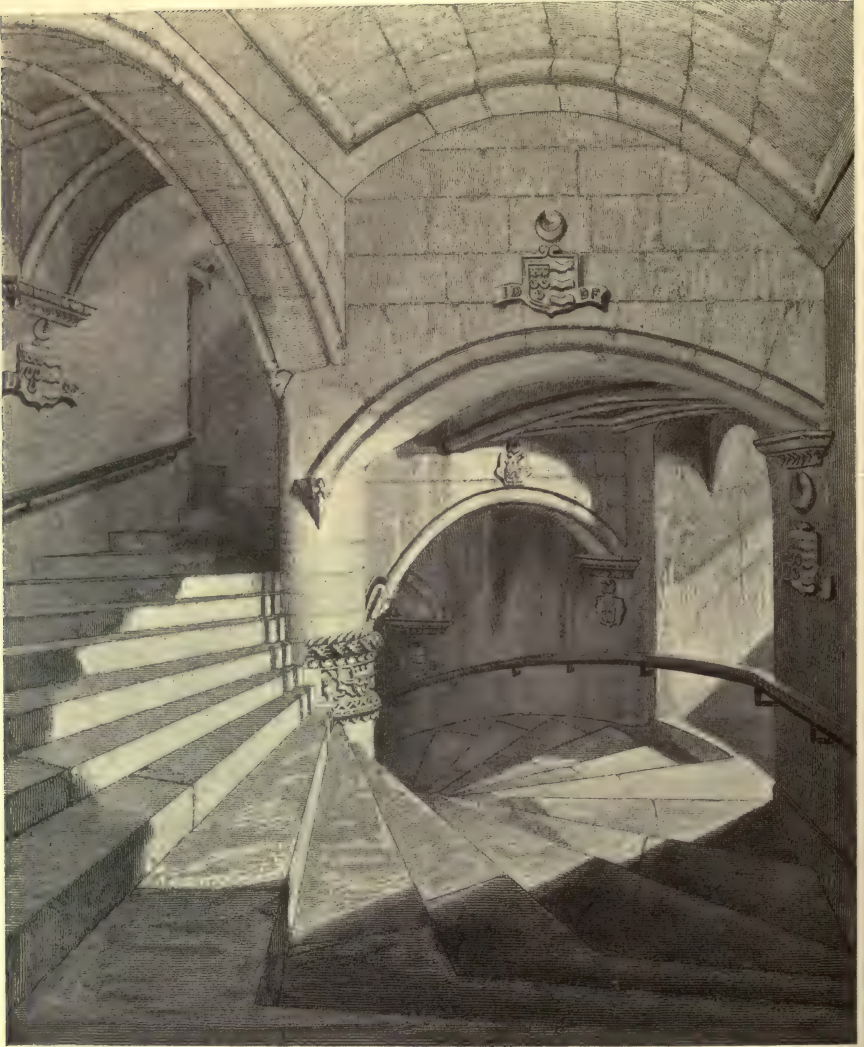


Fig. 15. FYVIE CASTLE.

and beauty at Fyvie Castle (Figure 15). In the seventeenth century a solitary attempt was made at Christ's Church College, Oxford, to revive the vaulted staircase, in which the centre newel carries an interesting roof of fan tracery.

All through Elizabeth's reign the small spiral stair was in general request for its own special purpose of providing direct communication between two floors where there was not much traffic. Cecil's Chelsea plan (Figure 11) shows this in a striking way, and we may recall the passage in Bacon's essay "of Building" in which he does not forget either kind of staircase: "The stairs likewise to the upper rooms, let them be upon a fair open newel, and finely railed in with images of wood, cast into a brass colour; and a very fair landing place at the top. . . Beyond this is to be a fair court, but three sides of it of a far lower building than the front. And in all the four corners of that court fair staircases, cast into turrets on the outside, and not within the row of buildings themselves."

In Bacon's own house formerly standing at Gorhambury, near St. Albans, Aubrey tells us, "was a delicate staircase of wood which was curiously carved; and on the post of every interstice was some pretty figure, as a grave divine with his book and spectacles, a mendicant friar, and not one twice." His essay "of building" was written when James I had already reigned some years, and when the Jacobean culmination of Elizabethan architecture had been reached. The luxuriance of the ornamentation, the crude magnificence of the carving and the unrestrained adaptation of structural forms in the service of pure decoration, have often been criticised, but it cannot be denied that beneath all this show there were some very fine elements of design. The refreshing *abandon* of the designers of this time should be welcomed when we see them capable also of the finely restrained proportions of the staircases at Rothamsted, Great Wigsell (Plate vi), or New Sampford Hall (Plate xviii).

At Hatfield (1612), (Plate ix), Blickling (1620), Rushton Hall (1626), and Temple Newsam (1630), can be seen the rich combination of all the finest Jacobean details. The square newels are covered with carving in low relief; the square-turned finials (formed so that each face is the proportion of a short pilaster, and carved with a lion's head or shield), support heraldic animals and sculptured

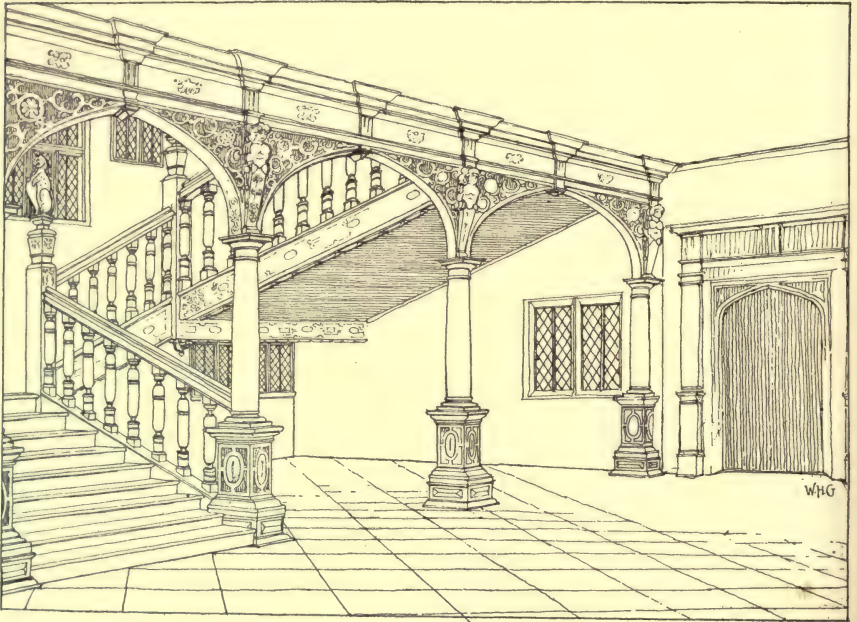


Fig. 16. KNOLE HOUSE, SEVENOAKS.

Drawn by Walter H. Godfrey.

figures; the pendants are beautifully shaped, pierced and enriched; and the dwarf pilasters which form the balustrade are of the most elaborate workmanship, and being connected to one another beneath the handrail by light keyed arches, they make a long line of arcading of great beauty. Other features go to produce even a greater and

richer effect. At Hatfield the entrance to the stair is overhung with elaborate scroll-work, an idea which was carried out more fully at Wakehurst, Sussex, where the surmount has almost the proportions of a screen without the lower supports. At Blickling, after the first flight, the staircase divides, and going left and right, becomes two stairs which balance one another,—a device that is very frequent in the large houses of the eighteenth century. At Rushton Hall and Temple Newsam the effect is heightened by the beautiful screens which partly shelter the stair from the Hall and upper landing, and at the same time reveal and frame its beauty beneath their luxurious arches. This arcaded screen is to be found indicated on many of the Thorpe drawings. Two of the best examples are at Dorton House, Bucks, and at Knole House, Sevenoaks, built in 1605 (Figure 16), where the arcade is repeated on the first floor and adds great dignity to the stair. It also occurs in a most charming form at Great Wigsell (Plate vi) which we have already mentioned. The strength and yet the simplicity of its two square columns with Ionic caps, the graceful arches, the well-modelled finials to the other newels, and perhaps above all the quiet reserve in the use of the carving,—a simple guilloche ornament being the sole enrichment to the most effective string—are all much to be admired. This method of carrying up certain newels in the form of columns to support the landing above added of course great strength to the stair, and the practice was not confined by any means to the Jacobean period. A less frequent arrangement but based on very sound ideas of construction, is met with in those stairs of which all the newels are continuous and run from floor to floor. Arches were often placed between them, and they formed in effect an arcaded screen to the well. The idea (if any prompting were necessary to so simple and desirable a form), may have been derived

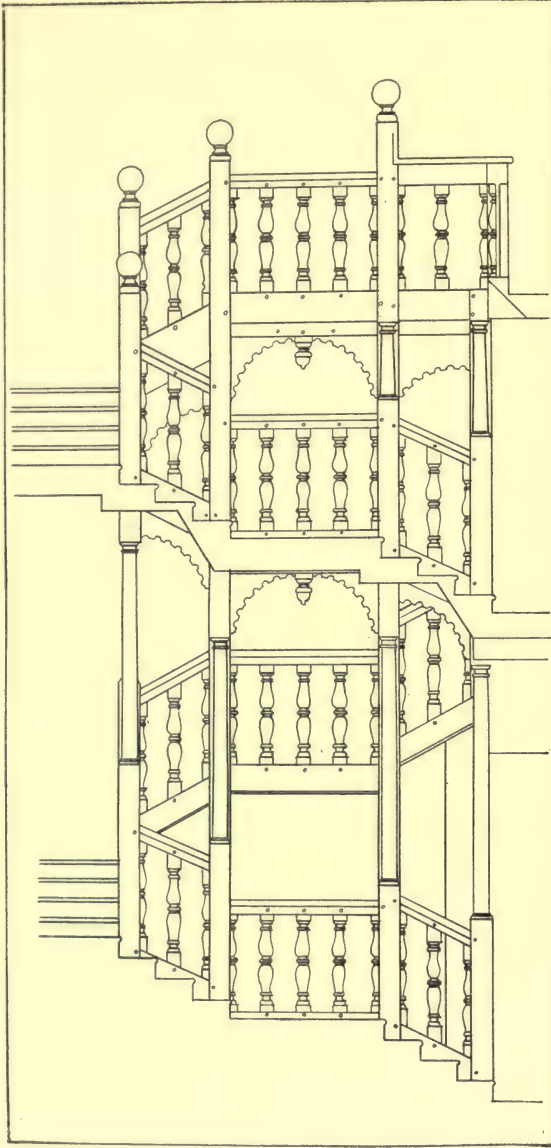


Fig. 17. CRANBORNE MANOR HOUSE, DORSET.

from the old well staircases sometimes found in square towers, where the well is enclosed by timber framing, plastered between the beams. At Canonbury Tower, Islington (circa 1520) this well is divided into a series of large cupboards, and it would require little ingenuity to open the framing and insert a balustrade. Indeed we find that the space *below* the handrail, at places like Boughton Malherbe and Leeds Castle, has retained the old plaster filling, the upper portion being open. However this may be, an example of the continuous newels is found as early as 1523 at Layer Marney in Essex, and later ones

at Burton Agnes (1602-10), Audley End (1603-16), and Cranborne Manor, Dorset (Figures 17, 18 and 28). The last-named is a very simple and effective design, while the first is peculiar in that the well is long and narrow, and the arches are thrown *across* the well at various heights. At Audley End the well is of similar proportion to that at Burton Agnes and the number of newels is the same, but the arches follow the direction of the handrail. The

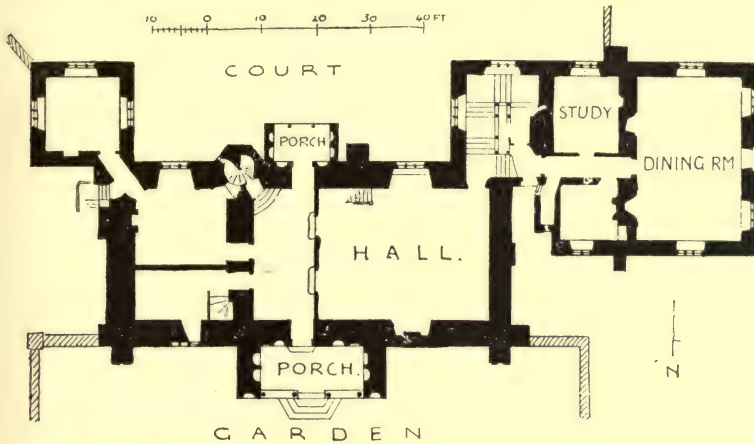


Fig. 18. CRANBORNE MANOR HOUSE.

newels here are decorated with very delicate pilasters and strap-ornament, and the balustrade adheres to the model of Hatfield and Blickling but is of a rather more refined type. The upper part of the newels is shown in Figure 27.

It is to be remarked that the use of figures and heraldic animals upon the newel has been associated, in the four chief examples mentioned on page 22, with the arched balustrade, as being perhaps the finest form so far designed. To these we must add Charterhouse and Claverton (Figure 19). At the former of these the heraldic finials

are placed upon pedestals of which the ornament differs in each case, while the latter is quite an unusual type, bold and well modelled, relying less upon superficial carving, than upon the simple lines of its pierced pilasters and the restful severity of its statues. Knole (1605) and Godinton (1628), both in Kent, form important exceptions, in that they combine heraldic finials with a balustrade of finely turned balusters of the Elizabethan type. We have already mentioned the screen at Knole (Figure 16), and the stair is covered with the usual carving on newels and string. Godinton, which bears its date in scribed on a panel, resembles Knole in the form of its

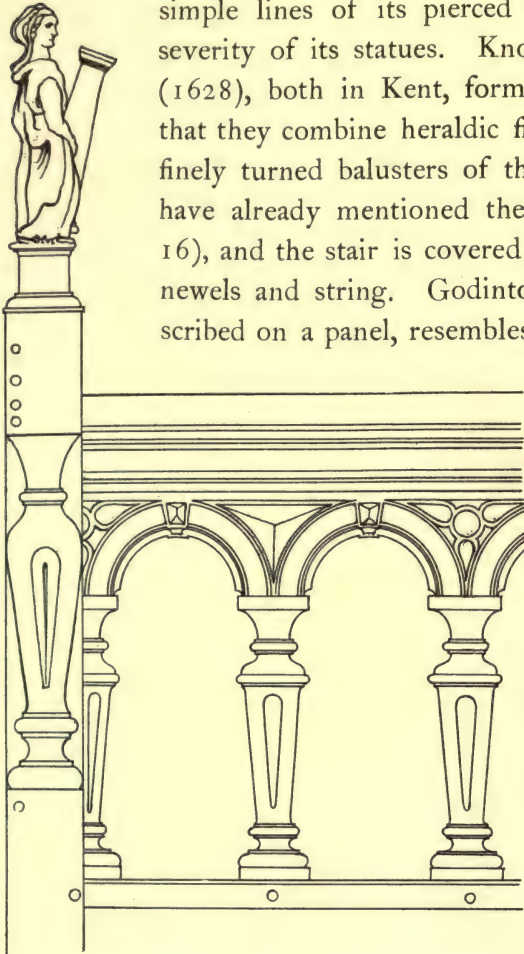


Fig. 19. FORMERLY AT CLAVERTON, SOMERSET.

heraldic animals and their shields, as well as in the design of its balusters. It is, however, overloaded with ornament, the handrail is carved with a flowing pattern of vine leaves and grapes, the first ascent is overhung with elaborately pierced carving in imitation of Gothic tracery, and the front of the balustrade is richly panelled. Several of the newels are carved with archaic and grotesque busts forming the upper part of pilasters, as at Sydenham

House, Devon, but the most curious feature is the division by a horizontal line of each length of the balustrade into two *triangular* portions, the lower part panelled, and the upper filled with turned balusters, which are thus of different sizes and varying in design. The principle is the same as that shown in the Great Kewlands staircase (Plate iv), where the upper triangle is closed by a rail and the lower is plastered. Some good heraldic finials are shown in Figure 20.

Of the other illustrated examples which have an arcaDED balustrade, the one at the Commandery, Worcester (Pl. vii), seems the most immature, and that at Great Nast Hyde (Plate viii) is unusual, though most striking in its total effect. The Dorfold stair (Figures 21 and 22), already referred to, pos-



Fig. 20. NEWEL FINIALS.
"THE OLD PALACE," ROCHESTER.

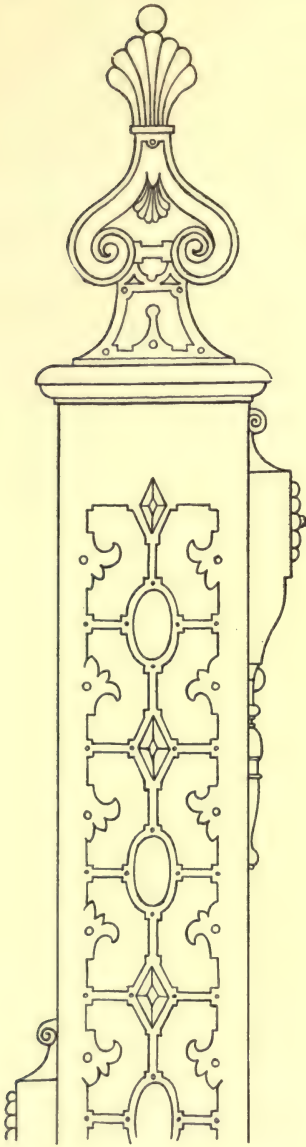


Fig. 21. DORFOLD, CHESHIRE.

esses particularly fine newels with characteristic Jacobean carving in low relief adorned with the "drop" ornament, and a freely modelled finial. And at the princely Holland House in London, we find in the newels and the balustrade that imitation of rusticated masonry (Figure 23), affected by the designers of the early years of the seventeenth century which appears again at Lymore (Plates x and xi), the Conservative Club, Hoddesdon (Plate xi), and Rawdon House (Plates xx and xxi) at the same place. The balustrade composed of pilasters unconnected by arches includes a large number of very fine staircases, which are notable for their excellent newel finials. An apparently early example is that at Letchworth Hall (Figure 24), which attempts rather unsuccessfully to follow with its lines the rake of the stair. A brilliant design is shown in Lymore (Plates x and xi), where the pilasters and newels are studded with "jewel" ornament. Charlton House, Kent (Figure 25), has the three orders represented with Doric, Ionic and Corinthian capitals in ascending flights. It is remarkable too for the lion's head shown in the sketch as carved against each newel, anticipating the "ramp" of the

handrail which came later and will be described in its place. The newel-tops at Charlton are varied and include finials of carved foliage, pierced pinnacles and seated lions. The staircase is the reputed work of Bernard Janson and dates from 1607-12.

Park Hall, Oswestry (Figure 26), is quite a typical example. The stair is designed to avoid the necessity, in a dog-legged stair, of cutting off the lower handrail where it comes beneath the string. It is therefore made with double newels which allow the handrail and balustrade to pass by instead of intersecting the upper string. Two other examples of this are shown in the Conservative Club, Hoddesdon (of the Park Hall type) and in the Castle House, Deddington (Plates xii and xvii). In these the finials are taken to an equal height, but at

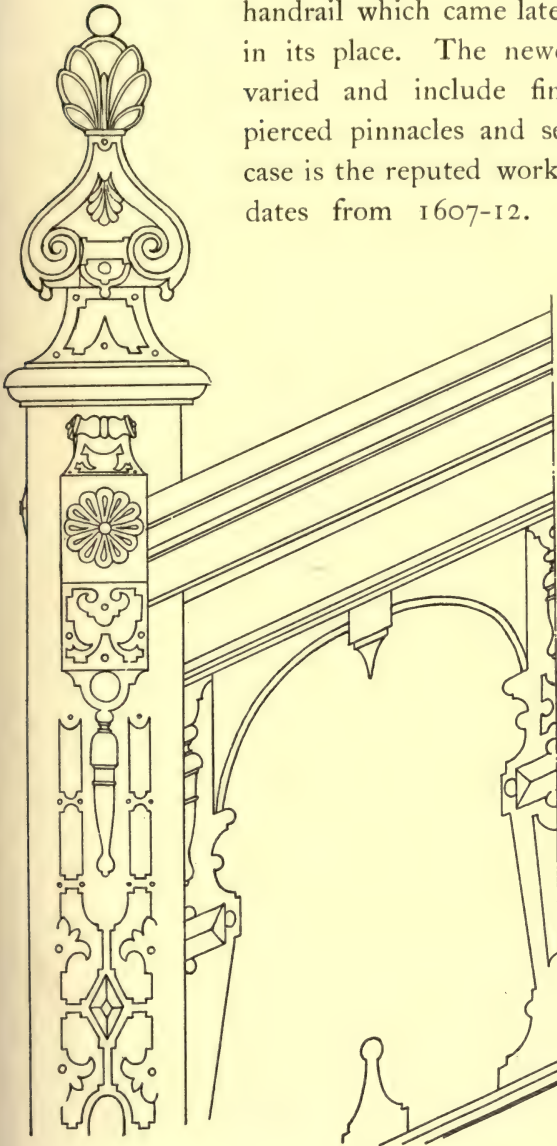
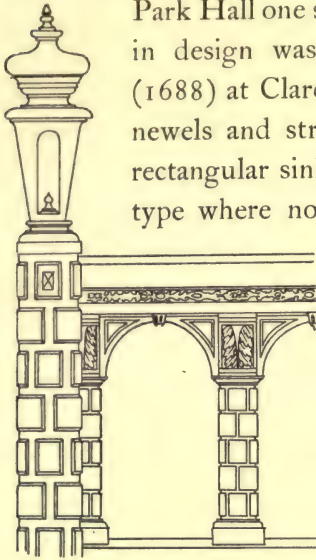


Fig. 22. DORFOLD, CHESHIRE.

Park Hall one stands well above the other. This difficulty in design was more successfully met at a later date (1688) at Clare College, Cambridge (Figure 35). The newels and string at Park Hall are covered with plain rectangular sinking, and the finials are of the usual fine type where no statuary is introduced, being composed



HOLLAND HOUSE
KENSINGTON

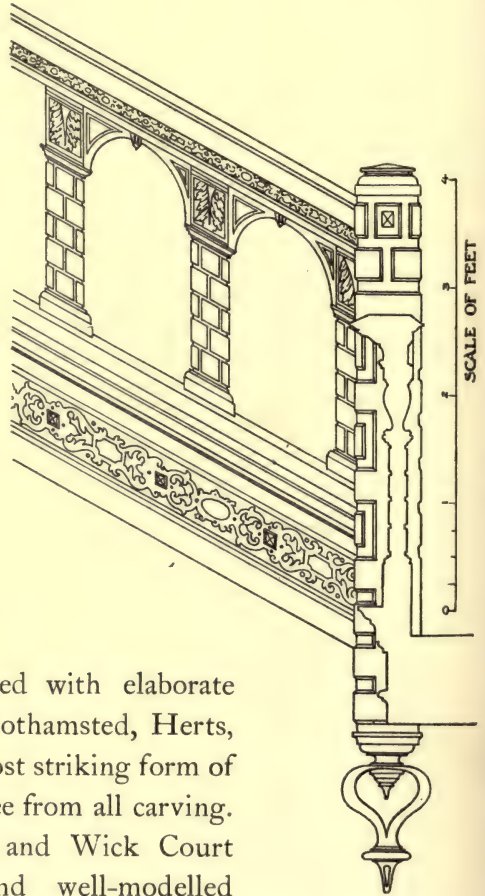


Fig. 23.

of the pedestal base crowned with elaborate square-turned ornaments. Rothamsted, Herts, provides the simplest and most striking form of both newel and balustrade free from all carving. Sydenham House, Devon, and Wick Court possess unusually bold and well-modelled pilasters placed close together in their balustrades, each having

characteristic Ionic caps. The newels at the former are curious, and are now crowned with old lamps of quaint design, and those at the latter have finials very much like the usual hollow carved pendants inverted. At Sussex Place, Bristol (Figure 27) a pierced Ionic pilaster is used in the balustrade, and in a late example from Bishopsgate preserved in the museum at South Kensington may be seen a type almost square in plan, carved on each of the four faces and requiring a very heavy string and handrail to cover it (Plate xiii, Figure 28.)

As already indicated those staircases which retained the turned baluster are generally furnished with bold and simple finials, but in these there is to be found great diversity in form. The Talbot Hotel at Oundle (Plate xiv) has a bold design over a plain panelled newel. The two staircases at Astonbury have both excellent detail. In the larger one (Plate xv) the



Fig. 24. LETCHWORTH HALL.

tops are formed of obelisks upon four balls (a *motif* not unusual in the design of Jacobean tombs), over a small sunk panel of a shape reminiscent of a Gothic cusp, and pendants in the shape of acorns. The string (Figure 14) which has been painted with flowing orna-

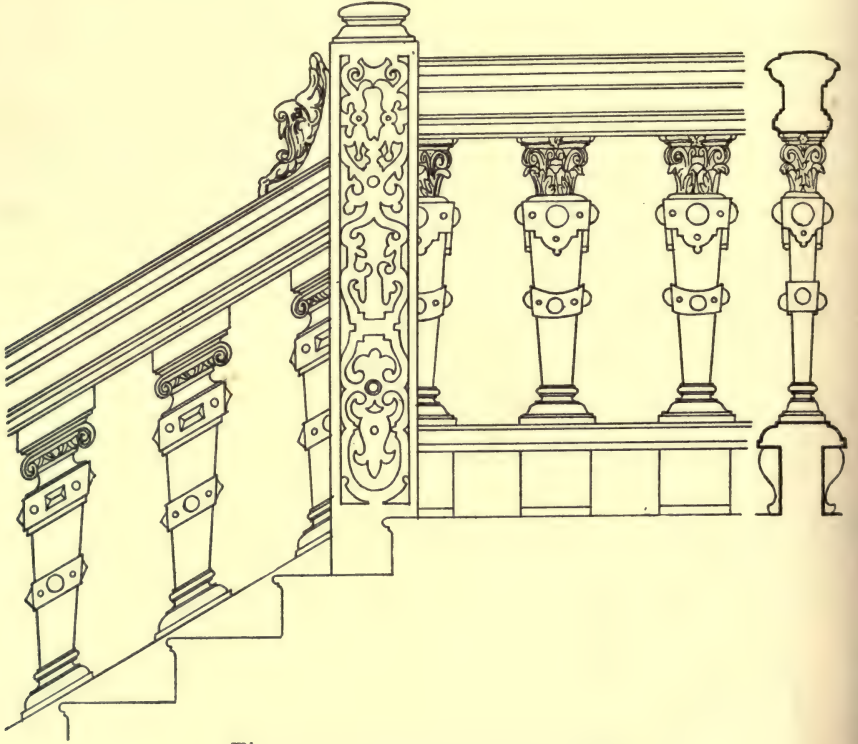


Fig. 25. CHARLTON HOUSE, KENT.

ment, is further adorned as at Great Nast Hyde with flat keyed arches which spring from the pendants and appear to give support. The secondary stair (Plate xvi) has pierced finials. The Castle House, Deddington (Plate xvii), has a fluted double newel capped by two balls, and the Methley stair combines a striking hollow finial

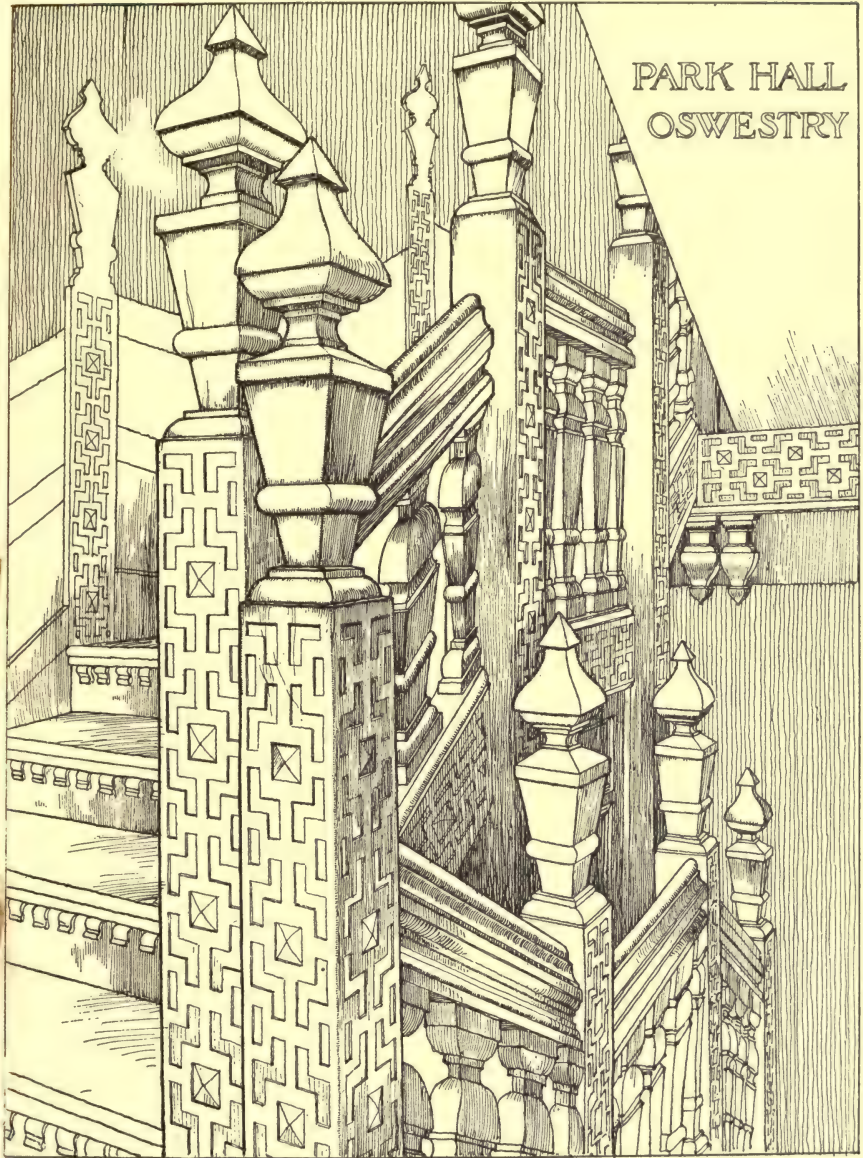


Fig. 26.

ELIZABETHAN STAIRCASE DETAILS.

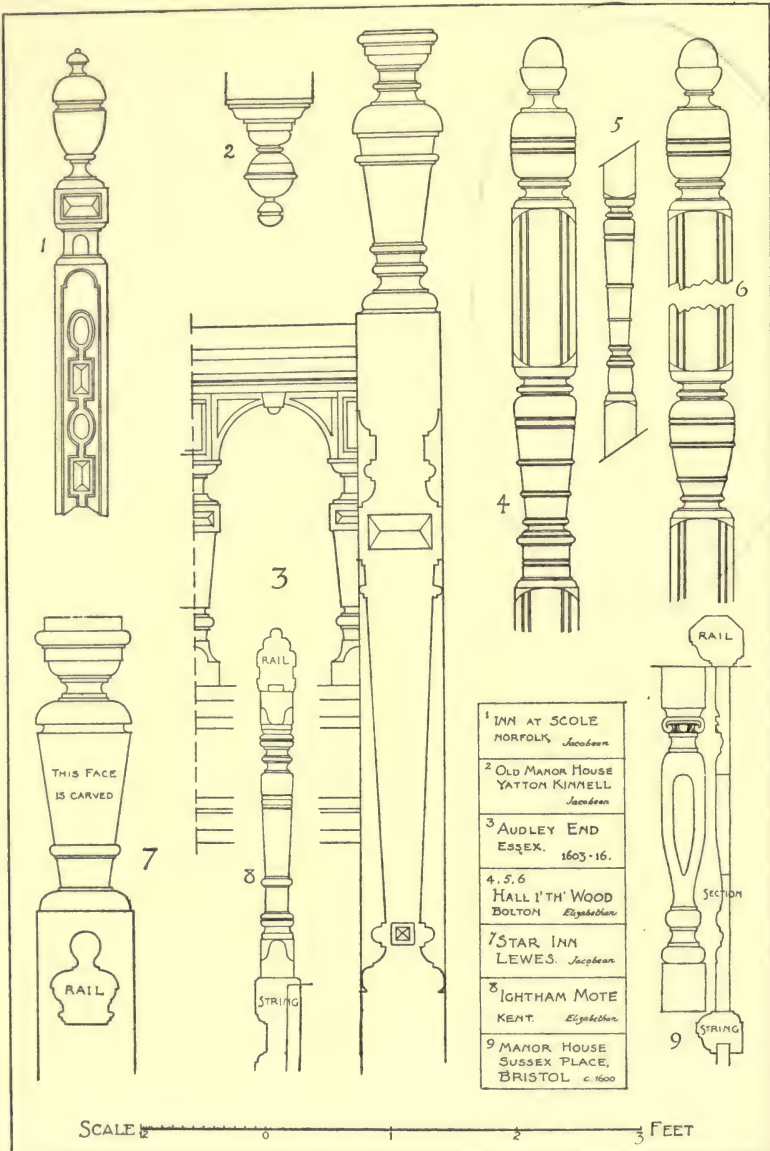


Fig. 27. DETAILS OF NEWELS AND BALUSTERS.

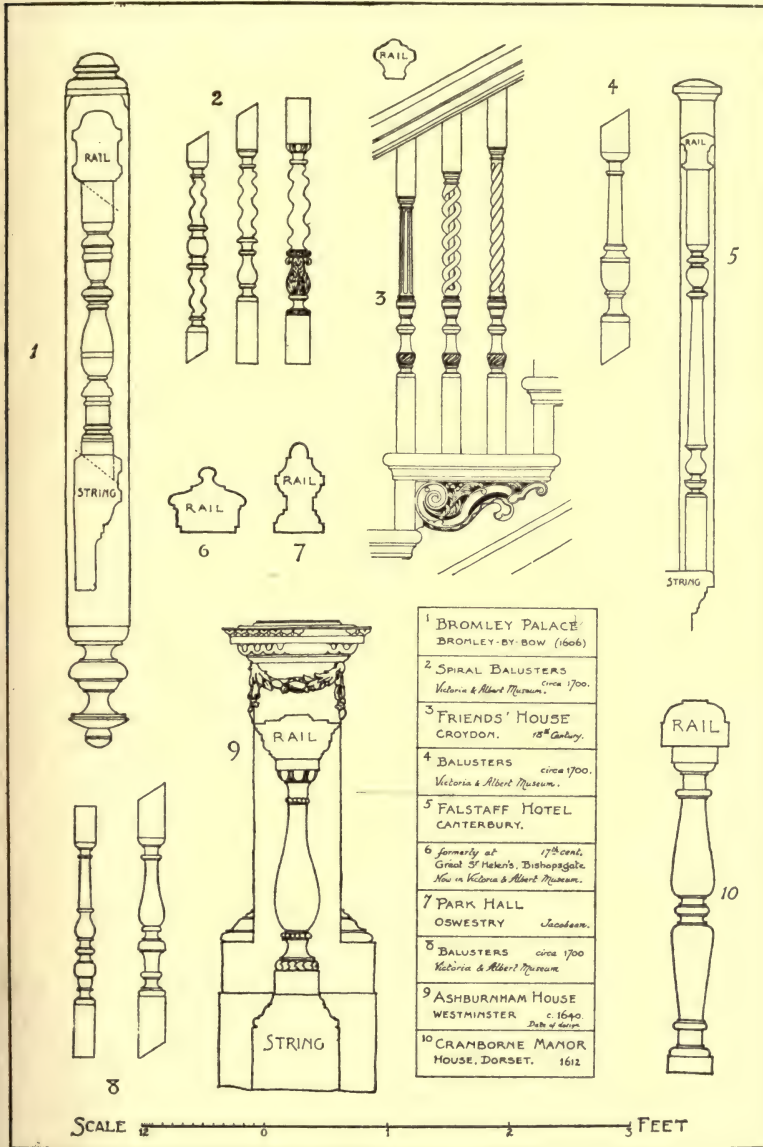


Fig. 28. DETAILS OF NEWELS AND BALUSTERS.

with a richly chased newel, and balusters of very elegant shape. But the staircase at New Sampford Hall (Plate xviii) is the most beautiful example. The carving on the newel, the delicately enriched pedestal finial,—ready for statuary but quite complete without it,—and the well turned balusters, could not well be surpassed.

Before the reign of James I was over a new fashion was introduced in the method of filling up the space between the handrail and the string of the staircase. Its simplest form can be seen in the earlier of the two stairs at Clare College, Cambridge (Figure 29), where the whole space is filled in with thin boarding pierced in such a way as to show the outline of a pattern in the contemporary strapwork design. The idea was quickly developed, carving in relief was introduced and the balustrade was soon converted into great panels of interlacing ornament. It is difficult to give an exact date to these staircases, for the large houses were many years in building, but the fashion had become fully established at the accession of Charles I, and continued with important changes to the end of the century. The two finest examples of this first period are undoubtedly Aston Hall, Warwickshire, and Crewe Hall, Cheshire, both erected about 1620-1625. They belong in every sense to the Jacobean type in all their detail, the former (Plate xix) showing as much reserve and dignity as the latter (Figure 30) an extravagant luxuriance. At Rawdon House, Hoddesdon (Plate xx), with its curious crudely carved panels (Plate xxi), on one of which appears the date 1622; at Aldermaston, finished in 1636, and well known through Nash's view although since destroyed; and at so late a stair as that in Cromwell House, Highgate (Figures 31 to 32A), built about the time of the Commonwealth, the Jacobean influence still prevails. The groundwork in the ornament of the panels is still the old strapwork although other subjects occur, and all three

have heraldic finials or sculptured figures. The rusticated work on the newels at Rawdon House, the rich carving on those of Aldermaston and the beautiful pedestals with Ionic caps which are provided for the types of Cromwell's soldiery (Plate xxii)—each and all proclaim their affinity to the time of James I. But these are the last stairs of which

Blickling was the type.

The all-conquering tide of the Later Renaissance was soon to condemn the newel to a completely subservient position in the design, and the first step that was taken abolished its figures and its finials, and merely marked its position by a modest vase adorned with fruit or flowers. This was accompanied by the introduction of naturalistic carving into the balustrade. These great staircases with continuous

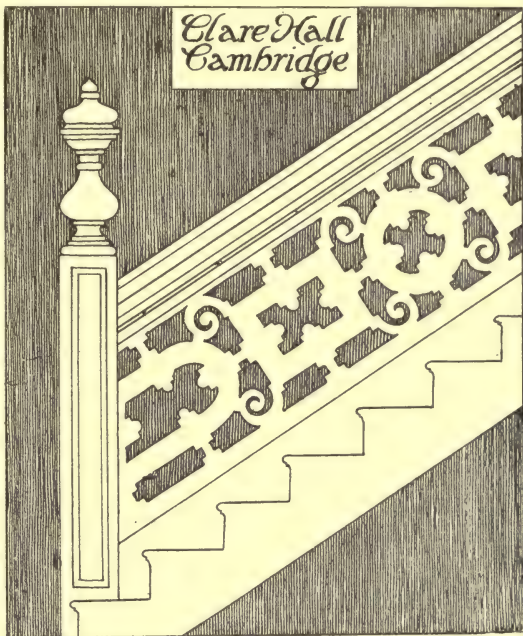


Fig. 29. CLARE COLLEGE, FORMERLY CLARE HALL, CAMBRIDGE.

balustrades of flowing foliage have been made famous by the exquisite workmanship of Grinling Gibbons and his school of carvers. But before them there were many less successful attempts which paved the way for the greater triumphs. There is a vigorous and interesting stair of this type at Hutton-in-the-Forest, Cumberland, where

the finials to the newels have already lost all character. There is the stair at Ham House, Richmond (Plate xxiii) with its flat carving of



Fig. 30. STAIRCASE, FORMERLY AT CREWE HALL, CHESHIRE.

Drawn by W. Twopeny.

war trophies and its baskets of fruit upon the newels, although a stair in King Street, Norwich, on somewhat the same lines but with



Fig. 31. CROMWELL HOUSE, HIGHGATE.

Drawn by Ernest A. Mann.

less carving possesses the rare feature of continuous supporting newels. Other continuous newels of an altogether unusual type are found in a rather later example at Castle Ashby, where they consist of straight columns, the shafts of which are completely covered with a carved imitation of ivy and creepers twined round them. Yet another stair on the somewhat rigid lines of Ham House

is to be found in a second house near Kingston. This has ball finials and recalls the fact that Number 5, Chandos Street, Strand (since destroyed), had quite an early type of ball finial combined with a crude but determined attempt at a continuous balustrade of flowing foliage.

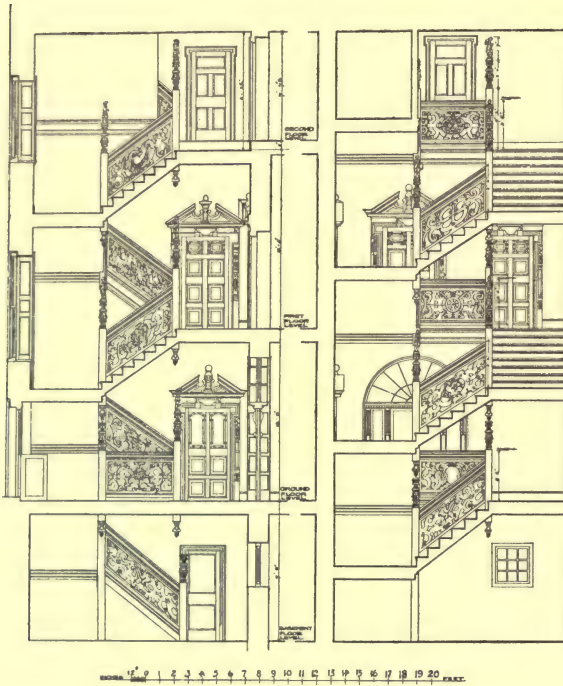


Fig. 32. SECTION OF THE STAIRCASE, CROMWELL HOUSE, HIGHGATE.

Drawn by W. Dean.

is beautifully carved with leaf and flower. The broad handrail has a bead enrichment, the string is carved with leaves, and the newel, panelled with fruit and foliage, rises a little above the handrail to

One of the first of the later and finest period of these staircases is that at Tyttenhanger, Herts (circa 1654), which

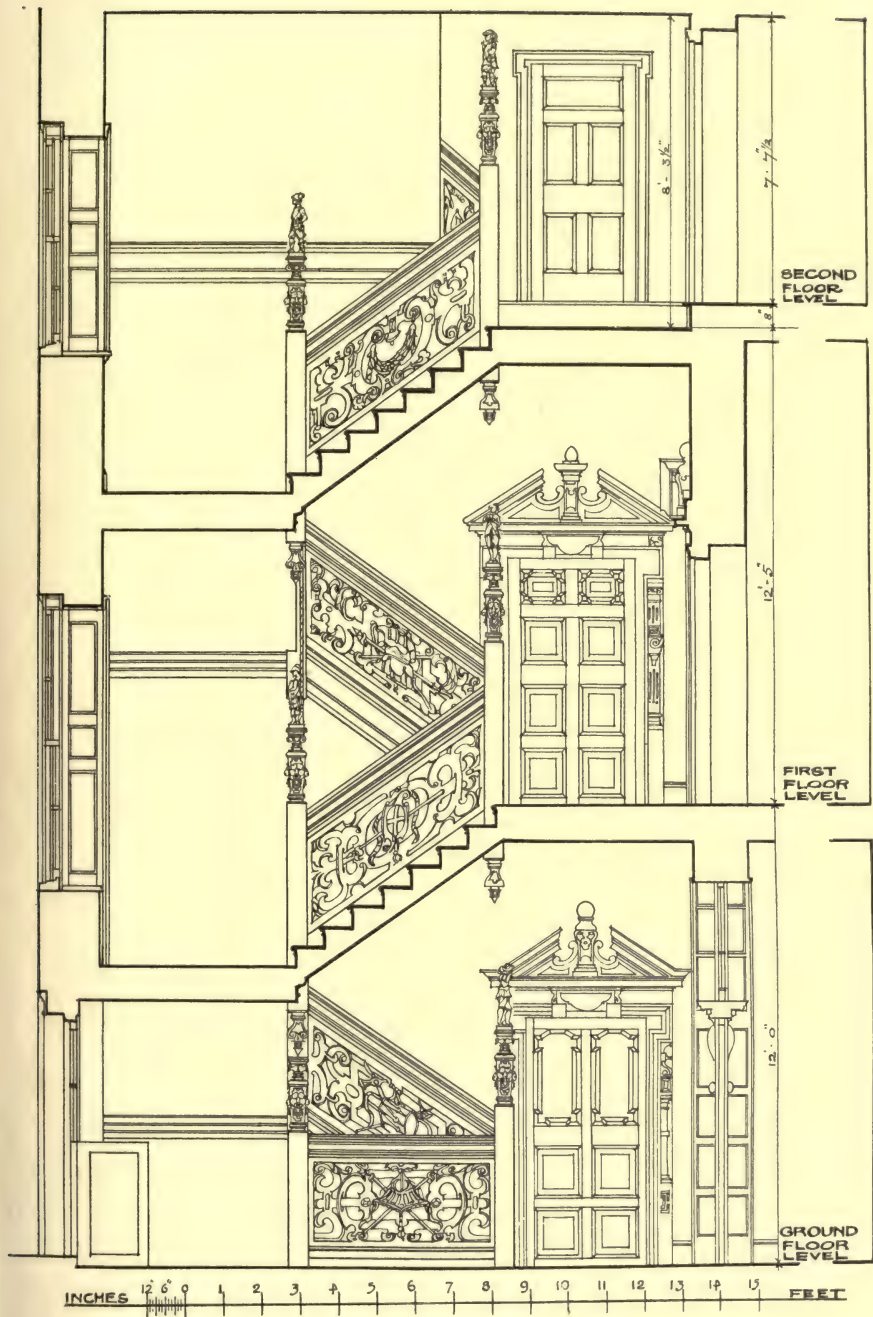


Fig. 32A. CROMWELL HOUSE, HIGHGATE.

Measured and drawn by W. Dean.

support a plain vase with fruit. This last feature is wanting in an otherwise very similar staircase at Stratton Park, Biggleswade (Plate xxiv). Tyttenhanger was probably built by John Webb, to whom must be ascribed the stair at Thorpe Hall (1656). Here the hand-rail runs over the top of the newel and

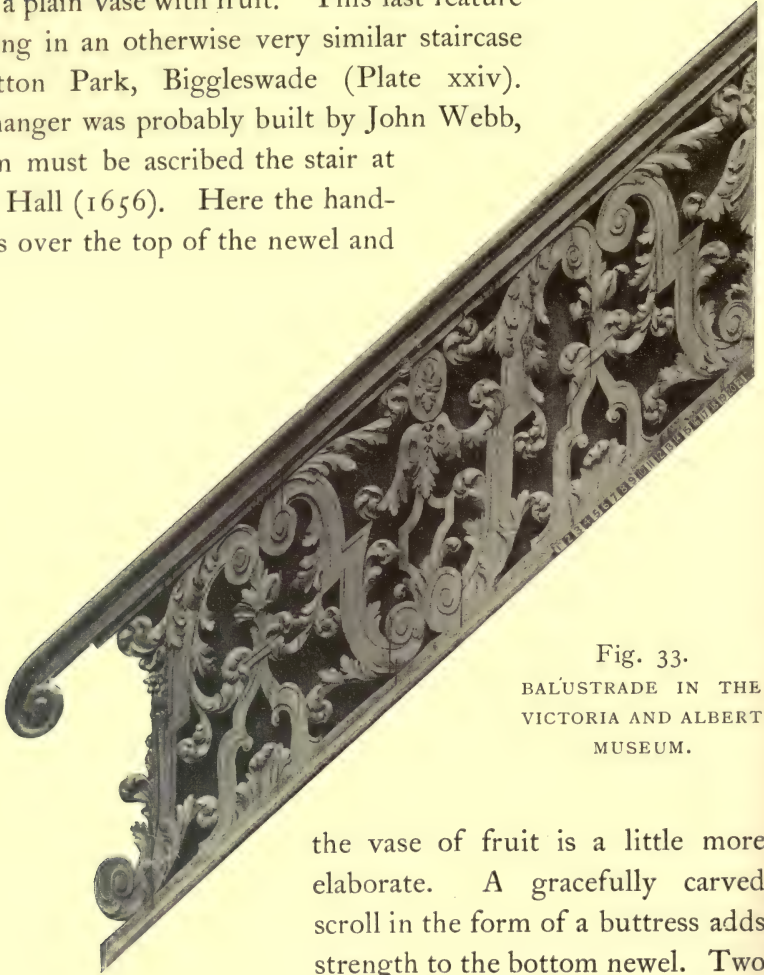


Fig. 33.
BALUSTRADE IN THE
VICTORIA AND ALBERT
MUSEUM.

the vase of fruit is a little more elaborate. A gracefully carved scroll in the form of a buttress adds strength to the bottom newel. Two years later it was probably Webb also who carried out the beautiful stair at Forde Abbey, Dorset, with a massive handrail, carefully ramped or curved up to each newel, over which it is mitred, and made to support a boldly modelled vase of fruit. A long flight of fourteen steps with a small

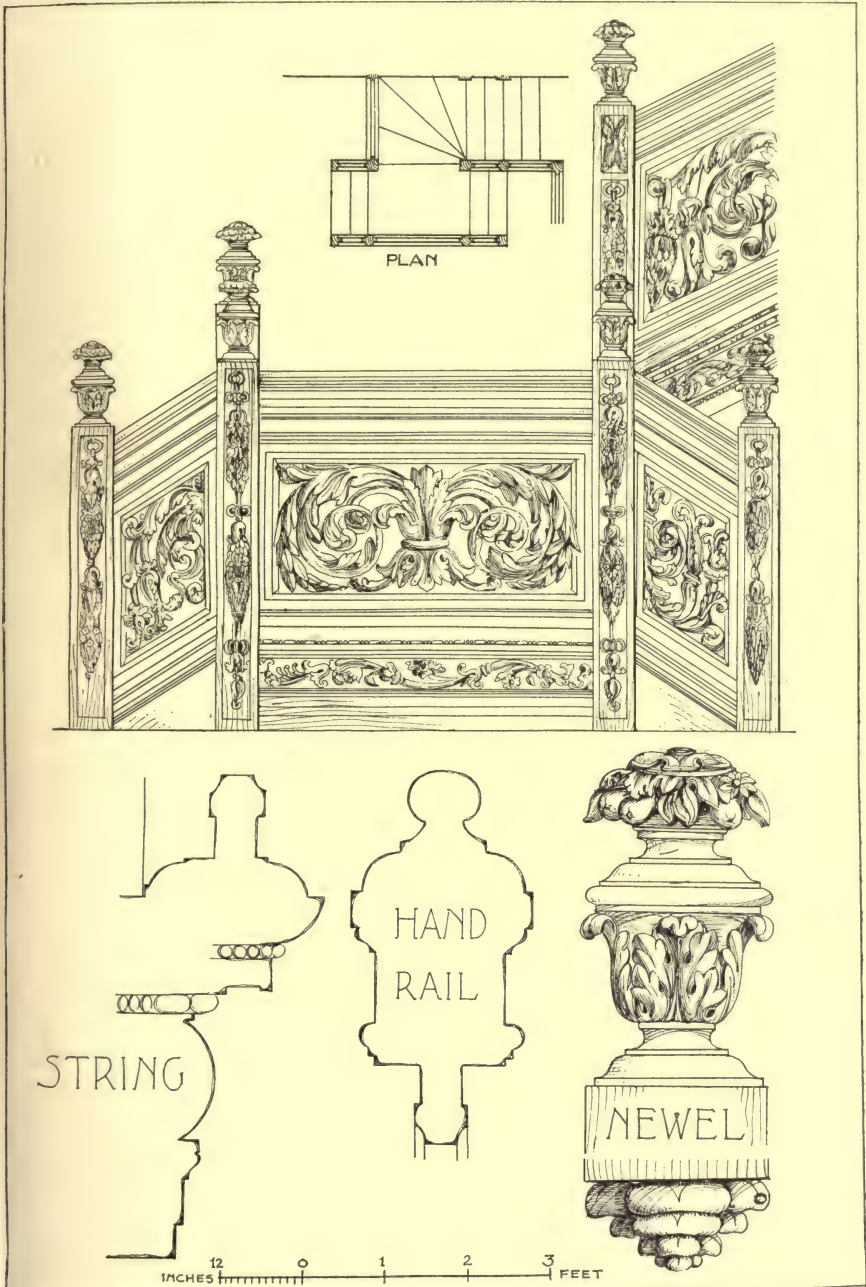


Fig. 34. STAIRCASE AT CROWLEY HOUSE, GREENWICH (BEGUN 1647).
NOW DEMOLISHED.

landing breaking it in the centre gives the occasion for four newels, and increases the strength of the design.

With the accession of Charles II the fashion for these monumental staircases was at once confirmed, and we have a surprising number of those vast works which must have absorbed the best craftsmanship of the day. The stairs at Durham Castle (1665), Eltham Lodge (1663), Sudbury Hall, Wentworth Castle, Cassiobury, Tythrop, Dunster Castle (Plate xxv), and Tredegar Park (circa 1670), are among the finest and must all have been completed within ten years. There is not the same finish in all the carving, but it is nowhere lacking in high decorative quality. Introduced at first in panels, it ultimately stretched the whole length of the balustrade. The handrail and string show a tendency to increase the boldness and enrichment of their mouldings (the latter taking the form of a long carved entablature) and the vertical lines are almost completely eliminated, until it is thought no longer necessary to mark the position of the newels, and the vases which had lost all meaning are finally omitted with great advantage, as at Tythrop and Wentworth Castle. The newel in fact becomes a massive pedestal, with the handrail and string breaking round it to form its cornice and base. The examples given from smaller houses illustrate the same principles in some

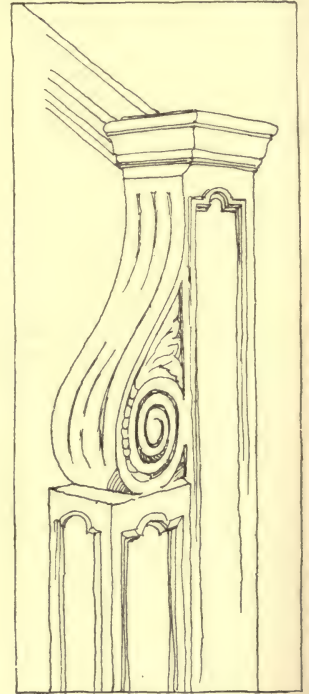


Fig. 35.
CLARE COLLEGE (1688),
CAMBRIDGE.

measure. Crowley House, Greenwich (Figure 34), is comparatively early. No. 25, High Street, Guildford (Plates xxvi and xxvii), furnishes a fine type of the balustrade and vase, while the beautiful stair from The Close, Winchester (Plate xxviii), gives all the characteristics of the later development, with the exception of the newel which is not capped by the handrail. A very elegant undated piece of balustrading from South Kensington Museum (Figure 33) may be mentioned here, although the delicate handrail indicates the work of the eighteenth century. The foliage is interspersed with scroll-work after the French manner and the effect is so good that the idea is worthy of imitation.

From this time forward the reign of the baluster is resumed in the whole kingdom of the staircase, with the single reservation of the iron balustrade to which we shall presently allude, and in which will be discovered some reminiscence of the wooden scroll work just described. But first we must retrace our steps and turn our attention to a certain number of stairs which did not follow the lines we have already sketched. It must be remembered that from the reign of James I we date the intrusion of the personal element into design, or in other words the birth of the modern architect. While the vernacular building—to borrow an expression from language—was pursuing its ordinary course, still wedded to the traditions of the past, a man like Inigo Jones was pursuing his own ideals and producing in the large country house designs which would not become popular until half a century later—a separation which has continued to the present day. At Coleshill, Berks, 1650 (*Frontispiece*), Inigo Jones constructed one of the most beautiful of all staircases, irrespective of period, having all the harmony in design and workmanship that comes from the invention and directing skill of a great artist. At a time when even the largest



Fig. 36. ASHBURNHAM HOUSE, WESTMINSTER.

Drawn by Edmund L. Wratten.

houses were making use of the balustrade of continuous foliage, Inigo Jones revived the baluster, but in a form that differed vastly from the earlier type. He introduced the simplest type, which made its first appearance in stone in the Italian renaissance, short in length, but broad in section, cut away well beneath a simple ovolo cap, encircled

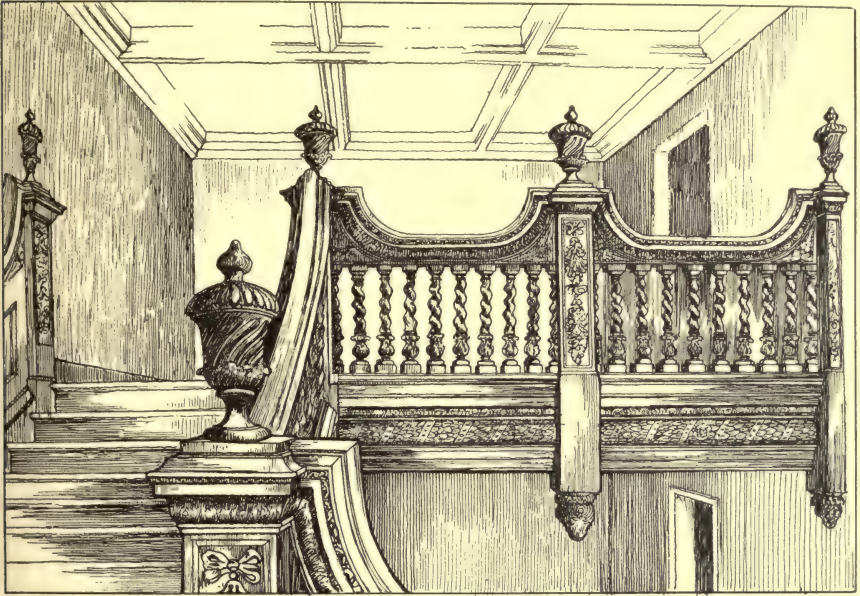


Fig. 37. WOLSELEY HALL, STAFFORDSHIRE.

with a necking, and gradually swelling to its full diameter before curving in again over a simple base. The cap is carved with egg-tongue, a ring of acanthus leaves surrounds the belly, and the base is further enriched. The whole stair, otherwise, might well have been the model for those at Cassiobury and Tythrop, except that the string, as befitting a more delicate treatment, is carved with simple festoons

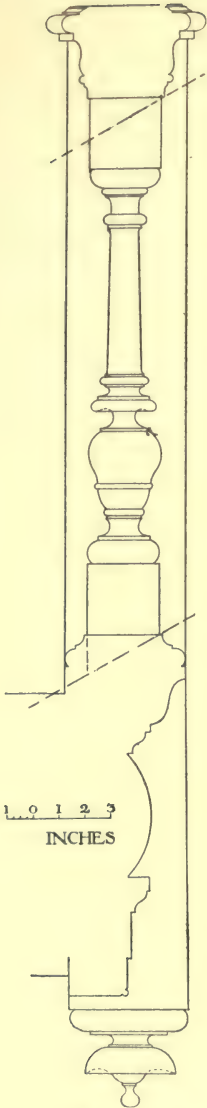


Fig. 38.

CASTLE BROMWICH,
WARWICKSHIRE.

and is not heavily moulded. We do not know that Inigo Jones himself ever used the balustrade of pierced foliage. Houses like Forde Abbey which he altered, were completed after his death, and places like Tyttenhanger are ascribed to him on but slender grounds. On the other hand, the beautiful and ingenious stair at Ashburnham House, Westminster (Figure 36), one of the most justly celebrated in England, of which the design at least is persistently ascribed to him, follows Coleshill in the essential character of its construction and detail (Figure 28). Both these stairs bear one mark of their comparatively early date, the handrail is not ramped to the newel as in a similar example at Powis Castle. Coleshill, unlike the Jacobean staircase at Blickling, is really a double stair, leading up on either side of the Hall. The influence it had upon the coming fashions is shown by the general adoption of its main lines in all work at the close of the seventeenth century. Its spirit is reproduced in the beautiful stair at Potheridge (Plate xxix). At Cobham Hall, Kent (Plate xxx), it is also seen but a desire for elaboration has given the balusters Ionic volutes, and has stopped the handrail against the newels in order to re-introduce a carved finial which is reminiscent of Charlton House and Wick Court, an inconsistency rectified in the portion shown on Plate xxxi.

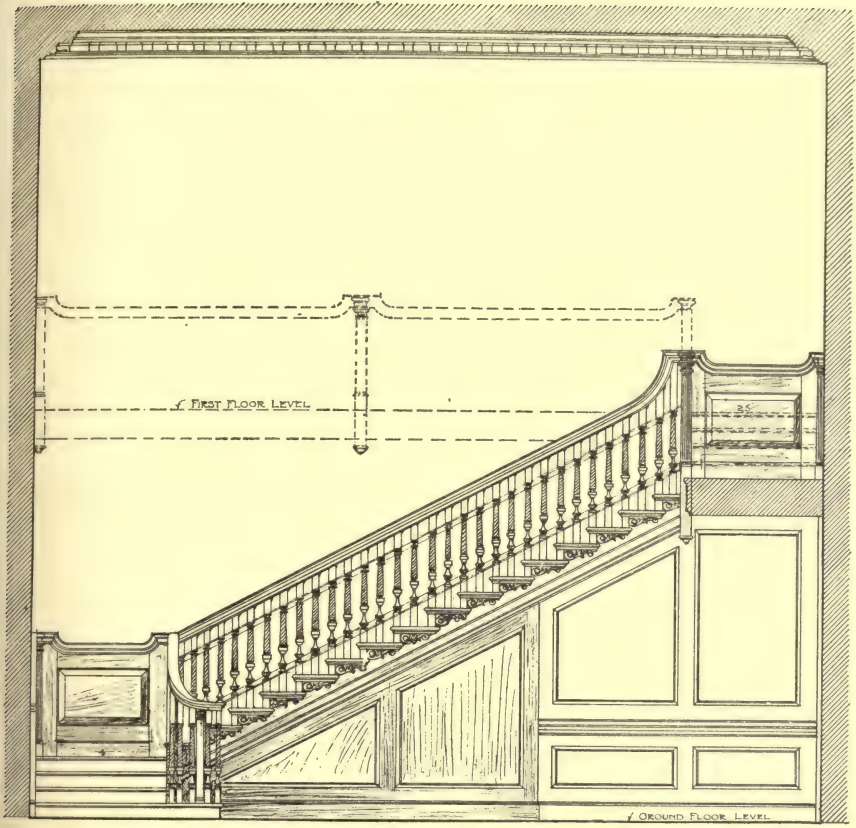
There was another novel factor introduced in

the middle of the seventeenth century which was to have far-reaching results. This was the twisted or spiral baluster. If we may trust the date (1652) on the newel at Dawtrey Mansion, Petworth (Plate xxxii), as referring to the stair as a whole, we have here a curious transitional phase which links the new feature with the fine old finials of Jacobean origin. The first balusters of this kind were turned in such a way as to give the appearance of being actually twisted, not carved with spiral grooves like the Georgian type. They usually had a small vase-shaped feature at the base of the twisted shaft. (See examples in Figure 28.) A stair at St. George's, Canterbury (Plate xxxiii), has continuous newels formed in spirals like the balusters, but the spirit of the age soon imposed the yoke of the flat heavy handrail, characteristic examples being those at Restoration House, Rochester (lower stair), and the Gordon Hotel in the same town (Plate xxxiv), which latter possesses an interesting and characteristic dog-gate of this period (Plate xxxv). The staircase which stood at No. 4, Crosby Square (Plates xxxvi and xxxvii) until its demolition in 1908, carries the type to perfection. The string and newels are beautifully carved, the handrail and balusters are slightly enriched, while the graceful ramp of the rail to each newel binds the whole together most effectively. At a staircase of this kind dated 1688, in Clare College, Cambridge, occurs the successful treatment of the double newel, already mentioned, where the lower post finishes against the upper with a neat carved console* (Figure 35). The Friars, Aylesford, gives a curious example of the application of the twisted baluster to a circular stair (Plate xxxviii) as well as to some fine straight flights. But the most sumptuous of them all is at Wolsey Hall (Figure 37), where the design and scale invite comparison with the triumphs of the two earlier classes represented by Cassiobury and Coleshill. The sweeping curves of the handrail are excellent,

* Good examples of the same feature, by Wren, are to be seen at Chelsea Hospital (completed 1691).

and the carved mouldings and beautiful vases over the newels give a very rich effect. All the fine lines of the type are to be seen too at Halswell Park, Somerset (1689), which is almost without carving. Here, as was the invariable custom, is a beautiful panelled dado, that reproduces the slope of the stair on the wall and follows the ramp of the handrail.

Along with those just described, the plain turned baluster had a considerable vogue, and many were the shapes devised by each designer's fancy. They were in the main short and stout, a good deal cut away from the solid and formed of full rounded shapes as shown in Figs. 28, 38, etc. It was some time before the fact was fully perceived, that the logical result of classicising the stair was to cut short the newel, over-ride it with the broad handrail, and abolish the finial. The tardiness with which this conclusion was reached caused a large number of more or less incongruous attempts to effect a compromise, chiefly by the use of the strange vases of fruit and flowers that had a brief popularity, as in the example given from Hever Court, Ifield (Plate xxxix), and in that at Farnham Castle. The stair at 9, St. Margaret's Street, Canterbury, affords a rare instance of a successful treatment on these lines, but the whole design is unique and owes its interest to the apparent mixture of features of two periods. The delicate little arched screen (Plate xl) is almost Jacobean in its lines, but the twisted columns and cherub's heads in the spandrils belong to the latter part of the century, as do also the balusters. The details of the upper part of the stair (Plate xli) reveal some good balusters with the incised lines that mark an earlier origin, and the boldly carved newels and finely proportioned vases would seem to antedate the screen. The excellent design of each feature and the skilful craftsmanship make the staircase a noteworthy one. At Westwood Park the newels are



ELEVATION ON LINE AA

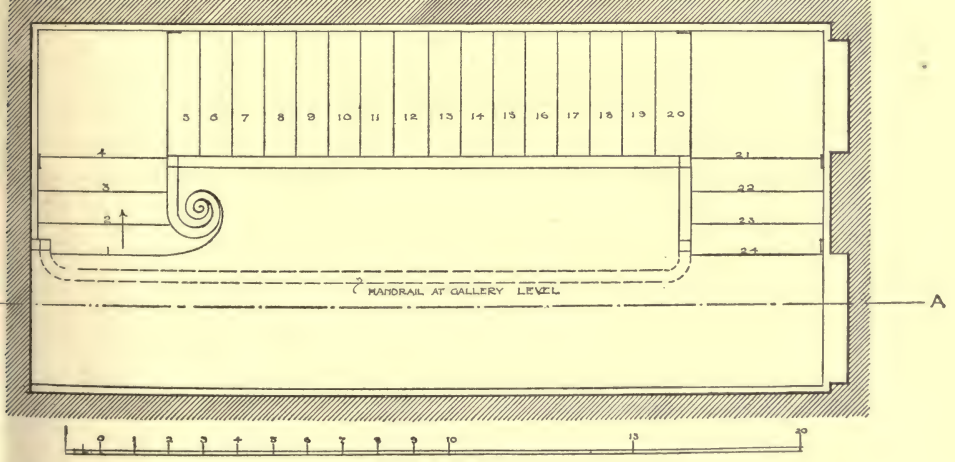


Fig. 39. SERJEANTS' INN, FLEET STREET, LONDON.

carried up as stout columns with elaborate Corinthian capitals, but they do not support anything beyond some ball finials, which make the design curious but not altogether satisfactory. Such were some of the compromises attempted during the Commonwealth and the reign of Charles II.

Of the latter part of the seventeenth century is the charming staircase in the Warden's House, New College, Oxford (Plate xlii), which has continuous newels, turned somewhat after the model of the baluster of the period. This treatment at so late a date is quite uncommon, and it was not long before the general fashion had purged itself of all survivals of the earlier modes and surrendered to the quiet and simple lines which we have seen at Potheridge, and which are well brought out in the house at Botolph Lane (1670), associated with the name of Wren (Plate xliii). The new style continued until the reign of Queen Anne, and countless houses built at this time in London and provincial towns are furnished with staircases of which the elements are essentially the same: long straight flights with a low balustrade, standing on a string moulded in the form of a simple entablature, and capped by a broad moulded handrail that serves as the cornice to the pedestal newel. The only feature left to remind us of the earlier function of the newel is the existence of the pendant, which, assuming the form of a carved rosette or a very shallow drop, was rarely omitted even to the last. The chief variety in these stairs was in the shape of the balusters, one of the best designs being figured in the detail from Castle Bromwich (Figure 38). Simpler types are shown from the Falstaff Hotel, Canterbury (Figure 28), and from some specimens in S. Kensington Museum (Figure 28). Quite another form is seen at Bruce Castle, Tottenham (Plate xliv), which was altered at the end of the seventeenth century.



Fig. 40. STOKED EDITH, HEREFORDSHIRE.

These staircases persisted in solitary examples well into the eighteenth century, as witness Rushbrook Hall (circa 1735) and Houghton (1722-35), but the general trend of design in this century was on very different lines. The extreme and somewhat constrained intellectuality of the Georgian era, mirrored so faithfully in the character of its furniture, made chiefly for that rather elusive quality known as elegance. We have already seen the exuberance of the early renaissance restrained by the desire for the correct classic forms which obtained from Charles II to Queen Anne. But the very essence, as it were, of the staircase was now to be materialised and expressed in the simplest lines. It was to be a flight of steps in one continuous curve from floor to floor and to effect this the covering string must be abolished, the heavy handrail must give place to a light and polished roll and the newel—in order that it may not obstruct the essential line—must become little more than a slightly accentuated baluster. This ideal was not completely reached until the finest examples of iron balustrades were introduced in the later years of the century, but every alteration that occurred was with this object in view. The first step was to get rid of the string, the necessity for which change is well shown by its unfortunate retention in the otherwise fine staircase at Hopetoun House (Plates xlv and xlvi). At Hatton Garden (Plate xlvii) we see the new method, the stairs being brought well out over the small constructional string, and the ends beautifully carved with the brackets or consoles which were to become the great feature of the Georgian designs. The ramp of the handrail now looks a more natural expedient, although in this case the newel rises independently a little way, and three slight balusters are allotted to each tread. The curve of the rail, and of the angle of the landing above, together with the carved bracket and drop below the latter,

help to bind the design together and give it an added grace. No. 44, Great Ormond Street (Plate xlvi) shows the newel as a simple column beneath the handrail, the lowest one being surrounded by a circle of balusters, a feature maintained in most of the other examples. Here the string appears enriched, *beneath* the stairs. The balusters, of which there are two to each tread, are of the usual slight form and show the small square block, introduced just beneath the shaft, which is the mark of the Georgian type. The grand staircase at Harrington House (Pl. xlix) has three balusters to each tread, among which there are two distinct designs, one having a hollow groove worked as a spiral round the shaft and the other vertical fluting. The Hook, Northaw (Plate 1), has all three balusters different, the third being an adaptation of the old twisted baluster, and this triple type became the general custom. The twisted balusters were still used exclusively in a few of the earlier stairs as at Sergeants' Inn (Figure 39), No. 6, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea (1718), and at its neigh-



Fig. 41. THE GREAT HOUSE, CHESHUNT.

bour, No. 4. This last named has its walls covered with painting, like the fine stair at Stoke Edith (Figure 40), which was painted by Sir James Thornhill. The three-baluster-type is again shown in

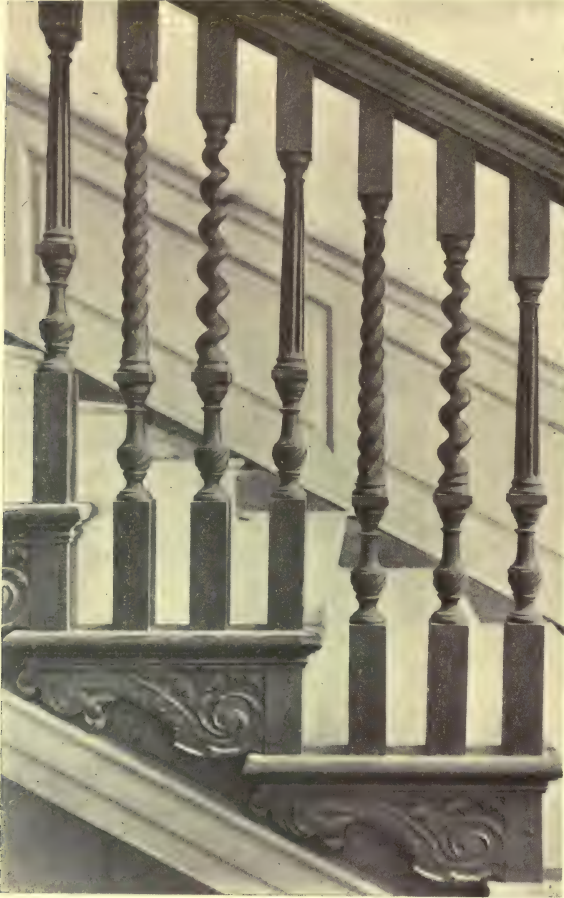


Fig. 42. THE GREAT HOUSE, CHESHUNT.

the Great House, Cheshunt (Figures 41 and 42), where the curve of the handrail at the half-landing is well illustrated. In the beautiful staircase at Friend's House, Croydon (Plate li), we may see that the carved string has not been altogether forgotten, but is commemorated in the face of the landing above, where no stair-ends would be possible. Here the twisted type of baluster has attained a very refined form, and is carved so that the outer spiral is cut free of an inner core about which it seems to wind in close coils (Figure 28). This idea was carried to something like excess during

the Great House, Cheshunt (Figures 41 and 42), where the curve of the handrail at the half-landing is well illustrated. In the beautiful staircase at Friend's House, Croydon (Plate li), we may see that the carved string has not been altogether forgotten, but is commemorated in the face of the landing above, where no stair-ends would be possible. Here the twisted type of baluster has attained a very refined form, and is carved so that the outer spiral is cut

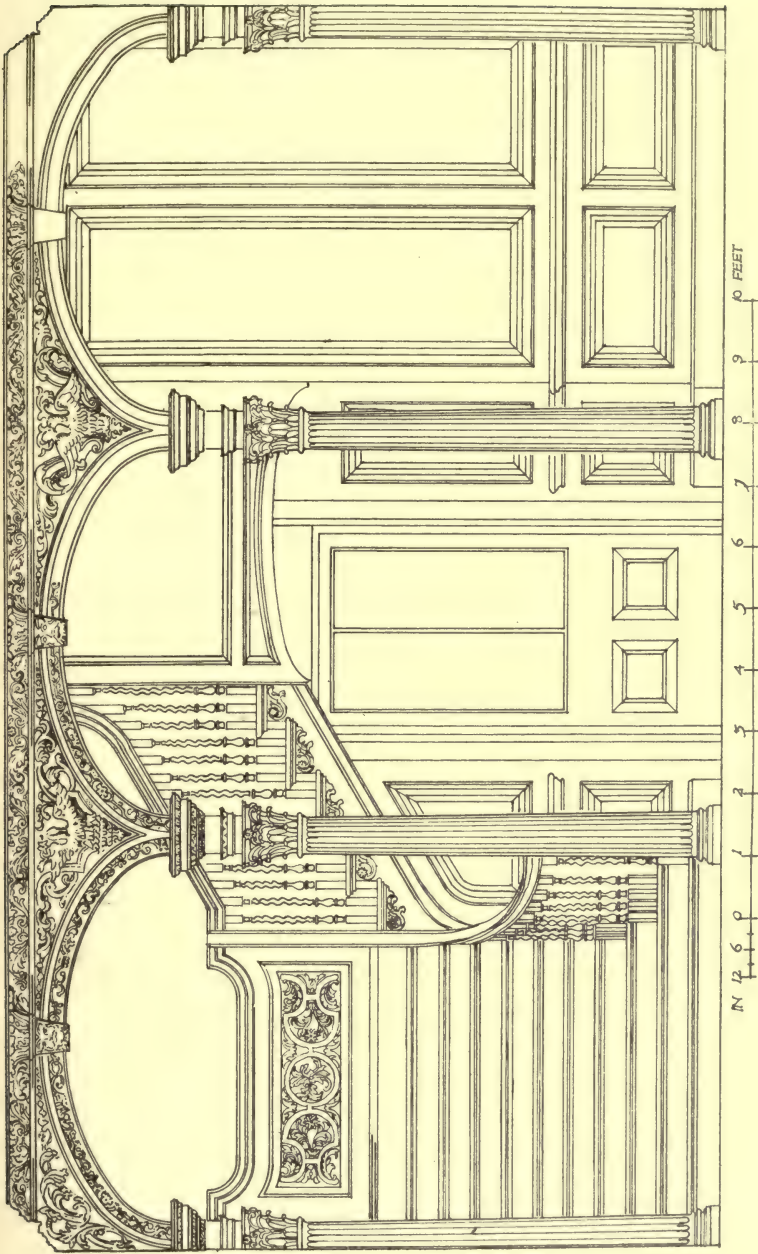


Fig. 44. WANDSWORTH MANOR HOUSE (NOW DESTROYED).

the Georgian period in the American colonies, where extraordinary ingenuity was lavished upon these spiral balusters and even newels. Every form of twisting flutes and mouldings were employed, and in some cases the core itself was carved with a spiral grooving that ran the reverse way to the outer coil.

Much variety was also shown in the design of the carved brackets, three of which are given on Plate lii and one in Figure 44. Occasionally, as at the Home for Aged Jews, Stepney, and the house of



Fig. 44.

CARVED BRACKET AT BRUCE CASTLE, TOTTENHAM.*

John Wood, 15, Queen Square, Bath, the outline of these brackets was projected the whole width of the soffit, forming a richly moulded ceiling under the stair. Other features of luxury were introduced in individual examples. At Glastonbury Hall (1726) is an oak stair, inlaid with light wood and mahogany, of which the risers are panelled. Wandsworth Manor House, now destroyed, had a carved screen (Figure 43), the Georgian counterpart of those at Temple Newsam, Knole and Great Wigsell. An unusual balustrade of laths

* This Bracket is from a different staircase to that illustrated in Plate xlv.

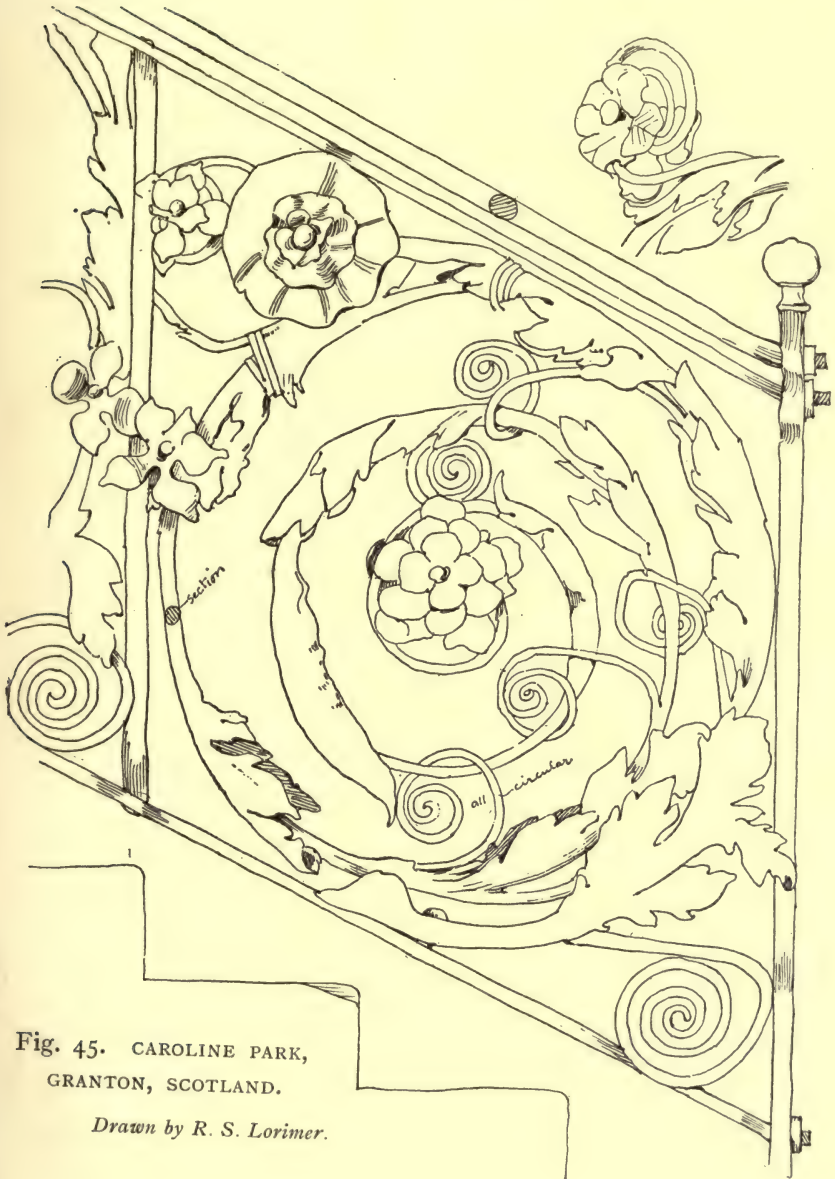


Fig. 45. CAROLINE PARK,
GRANTON, SCOTLAND.

Drawn by R. S. Lorimer.

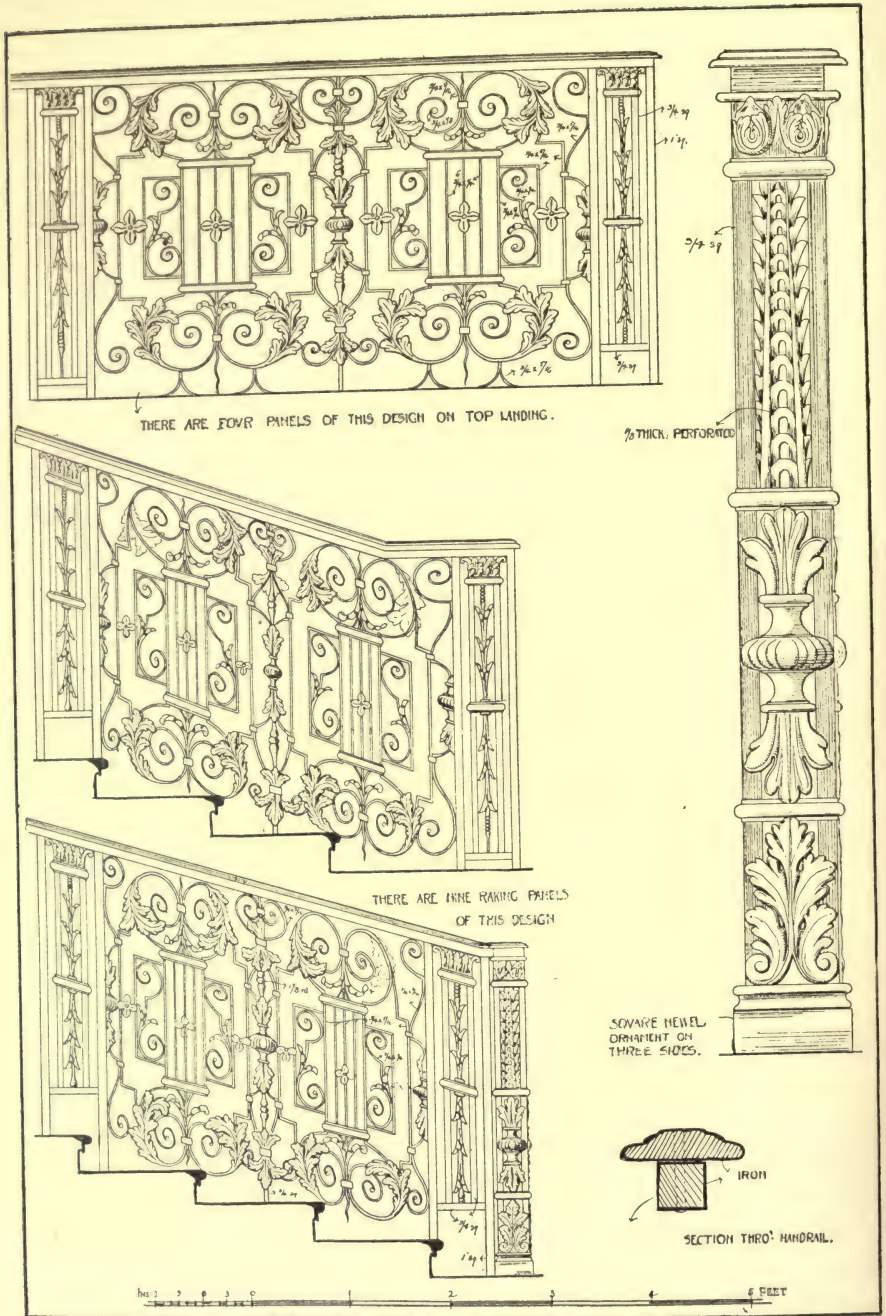


Fig. 46. THE KING'S STAIRCASE, HAMPTON COURT.

Measured and drawn by Albert Halliday.

arranged in a geometric pattern is that at 5, John Street, Bedford Row (Plate liii), although the secondary staircase in some houses was sometimes furnished with a rather simpler pattern, as at No. 6, Cheyne Walk, Chelsea.

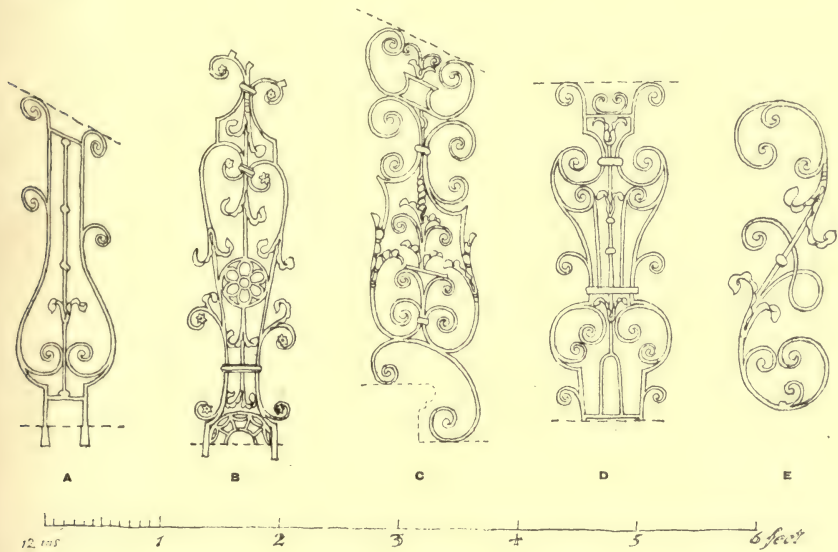


Fig. 47. PATTERNS OF IRON BALUSTERS.

IN THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, EXCEPT C WHICH IS AT DRAYTON HOUSE, NORTHANTS.

The application of iron to the staircase balustrade was introduced in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, and it rapidly became the fashion in the greater mansions. Suggested at first perhaps by the continuous balustrade of foliage in wood, it was afterwards retained owing to its peculiar suitability to the designs which, as we have seen, the following century required. It is not our intention to go, at any length, into the development of eighteenth century ironwork, a large subject and capable of occupying a volume in



Fig. 48. ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL.

itself. We will therefore content ourselves with giving examples of the different types, and comment on the function that each was able to perform.

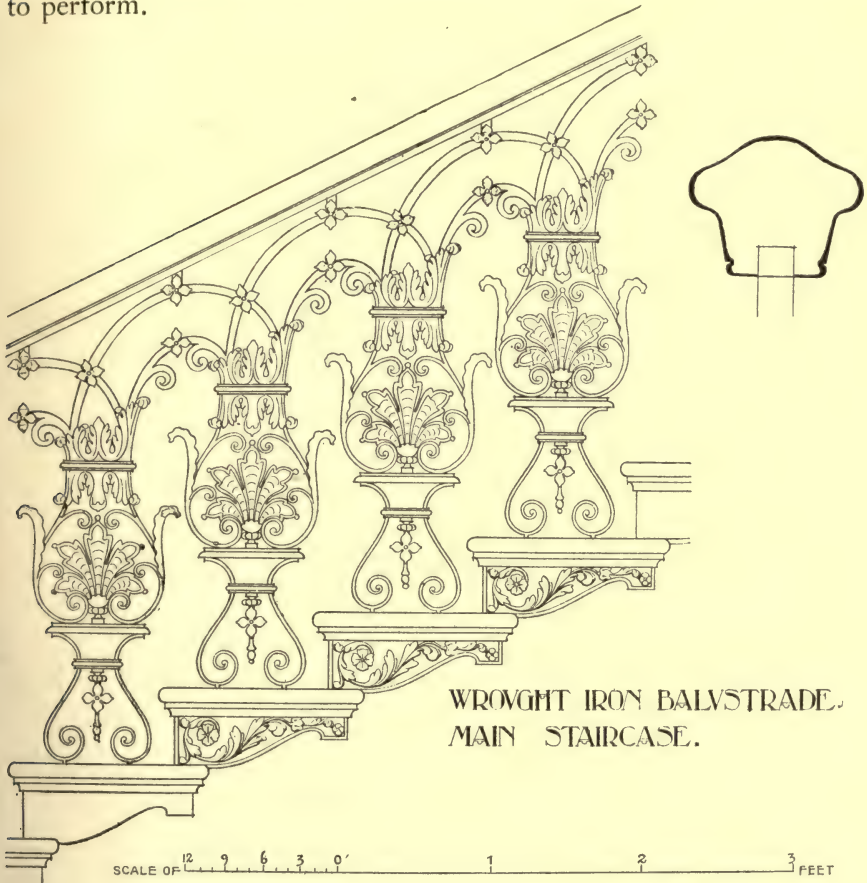


Fig. 49. ST. HELEN'S HOUSE, DERBY.

Drawn by C. H. Potter.

In Scotland we find the most curious attempts to follow the lines of the continuous foliage designs, the stair at Caroline Park, Granton (Figure 45), dated 1685, being one of the most successful.

The foliage is divided into panels by upright bars and the treatment is simple and effective. With this should be compared the work at Holyrood Palace, Hopetoun House and Craigiehall.



Fig. 50. 8, GROSVENOR SQUARE.

Drawn by Edmund L. Wratten.

Under Sir Christopher Wren, who may or may not have designed the iron-work himself, we find the adoption of the more familiar treatment of the metal, a treatment that led the craft to such an extraordinary pitch of success that it has made this period famous for its beautiful examples of gates and railings. Using bars of a square or oblong section, the designer worked them into simple scrolls and curves, generally in long vertical panels, the outlines being symmetrically repeated each side of a central bar. The main lines, or skeleton, of the design were thus always emphasised and the panel was further elaborated with smaller scrolls and foliage,

which followed or grew out of the guiding curves. The beautiful

staircases at Hampton Court (Plate liv and Figure 46), the workmanship of Jean Tijou, show this type in perfection. Wren's pupils and successors followed on the same lines, as (to take one example by Hawksmoor) at Easton Neston (1702-13), where however the flowing work is confined to the landings, the rest being divided into

small panels, one to each stair. This illustrates that tendency to resume the "baluster" idea, which declares itself most openly in Sir John Vanbrugh's staircase at Beningbrough Hall, Yorkshire, where stout iron balusters are actually used, relieved at intervals by panels of scroll-work. Here, however, the result was scarcely satisfactory, and the more usual practice took the form of a compromise. The



Fig. 51. QUEEN'S HOUSE, CHELSEA.

scroll-work of the panels was freed from the rigid enclosing lines seen at Easton Neston, and being made in a form, the individuality of which was easily recognisable, they were placed in suc-

cession along the balustrade in exactly the same way as the earlier balusters themselves (Figure 47). In the masterly design for his circular stair in St. Paul's Cathedral (Figure 48), Wren himself used this form, and its appropriateness here is as readily discernible as in such final types as the one at Sheen House, Richmond (Plate lxi), which we shall notice in a moment. The long continuous line of the balustrade curving in one sweep from floor to floor, is emphasised more by a succession of vertical balusters or panels, than by an unbroken filling of flowing lines. The principle is the same as that which underlies the façade of a Greek temple,

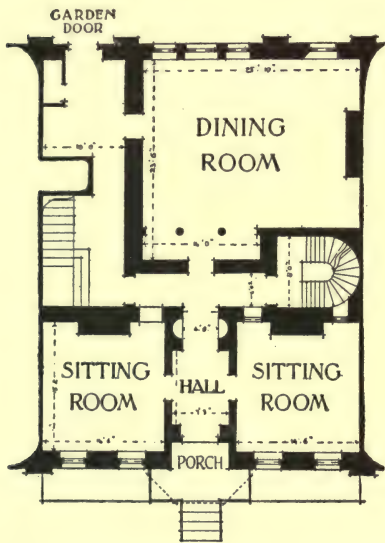


Fig. 52. QUEEN'S HOUSE, CHELSEA.

the horizontal effect of which is accentuated by the row of vertical columns. The forms taken by these panels do not number a great variety but are usually tasteful and elegant (Figure 47). The earlier types are somewhat the shape of a lyre, as in the charming stair at St. Helen's House,* Derby (Figure 49), the work of Robert Bakewell, the Derbyshire smith (flourished 1707-23). Later in the eighteenth century the S type found much favour, as at Whitehall Gardens (Plate lx) and at 8, Grosvenor Square (Figure 50).

The last-named shows the sweeping curve of the flight of steps in a marked degree, and it soon became fashionable to have at least one circular stair, and that often the principal one, in the house. Two examples of small stairs are shown in the illustrations, one from

* Cf. Okeover Hall, Staffs., where an almost precisely similar design occurs.

Queen's House, Chelsea (Plate lix and plan in Figure 52), and one from Baddow Hall, Essex (Plate lxii). In both of these the iron panels are curiously reminiscent of the pierced wooden balusters of early Elizabethan days. The stair at Queen's House is remarkable for the beauty of the carved brackets, which appear at the end of each step from the basement to the top floor (Figure 51). An

example of monumental work is given in Plates lv and lvi which illustrate the staircase inserted by Isaac Ware in the Earl of Chesterfield's house. This stair was brought from Canons, Middlesex, the property of the Duke of Chandos, and beyond the change in the coronet needed no further alteration.

The Earl remarks that "the staircase particularly will form such a scene as is not in England. The expense will ruin me but the enjoyment will please me."

The brothers Adam and their disciples put the finishing touch to the eighteenth century staircase. However much of innovation we may consider they introduced into other features, in the staircase at least they found a subject which had attained a form almost equal



Fig. 53.

DESIGN BY ROBERT ADAM FOR GAWTHORP HOUSE.

to their own delicacy and refinement. Two graceful sketches for a balustrade by them are shown in Figures 53 and 54. If not actually an "Adam" stair, the one from Sheen House, Richmond (Plate lxi), is a typical example and a perfect embodiment of the idea which we have endeavoured to show was the goal of the Georgian designer: the subservience of every part to the upward gliding plane of the stair itself. Another stair of this period is shown from 35, Lincoln's Inn Fields (Plate lvii), but here, either from deliberate choice, or

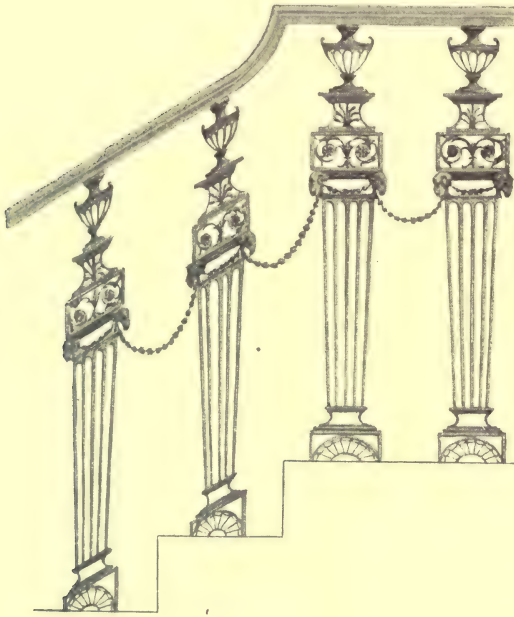


Fig. 54. DESIGNED BY ROBERT ADAM.

because the owner re-used some old material, the lower portion possesses the lyre-shaped panels of an earlier fashion. The stair presents an interesting contrast and the panel on the landing is worthy of Jean Tijou (Plate lviii). The lines of the hand-rail in these examples are very graceful and they finish on the ground floor in the same hollow circular newel which we observed in the wooden Georgian stairs. A particularly successful design

which covers the circular staircase at Millerstair is shown in Figure 55.

From this time design became impoverished. Sir John Soane made a felicitous composition in his stair at the old War Office (Plate lxiii) which, lit from above, invested the circular colonnade and the simple lines of the steps with a certain charm and dignity. The plain iron bars which do duty as balusters are curved, and this arrangement became the fashion for a brief period since it maintained the severity of character, at the same time affording to the eye a little relief. The way, however, was being prepared for the cast-iron balustrades and the miserable successors of the old turned balusters in wood, which were to last throughout the decline of architectural art, until the days of the revivals had come. In some of the greater mansions staircases in "the grand manner" were being constructed of stone or marble, as at Holkham Hall, Norfolk, built circa 1754. At Devonshire House, London, is a successful design with marble steps, bronze scroll-work and an alabaster handrail.

In the short period of the three centuries which have been the

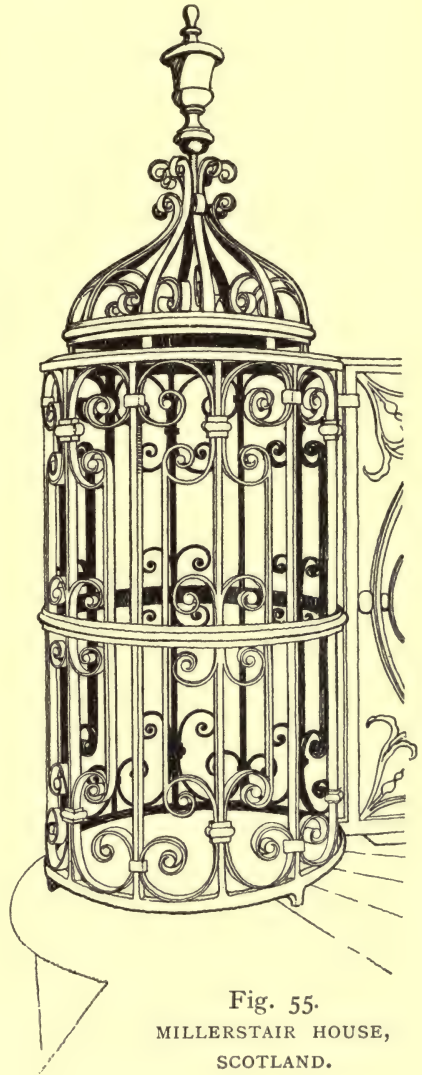


Fig. 55.
MILLERSTAIR HOUSE,
SCOTLAND.

main subject of our review, the staircase is seen to have mirrored with remarkable fidelity not only the great changes in style but even the minor modifications and eccentricities of fashion. It reflected the glory of the early renaissance, the solidity and restraint of the later classical design, and the whimsical intellectuality of the eighteenth century, and in the end, it faded from interest, with the death of all invention and inspiration in the art in which it had held so high a place.

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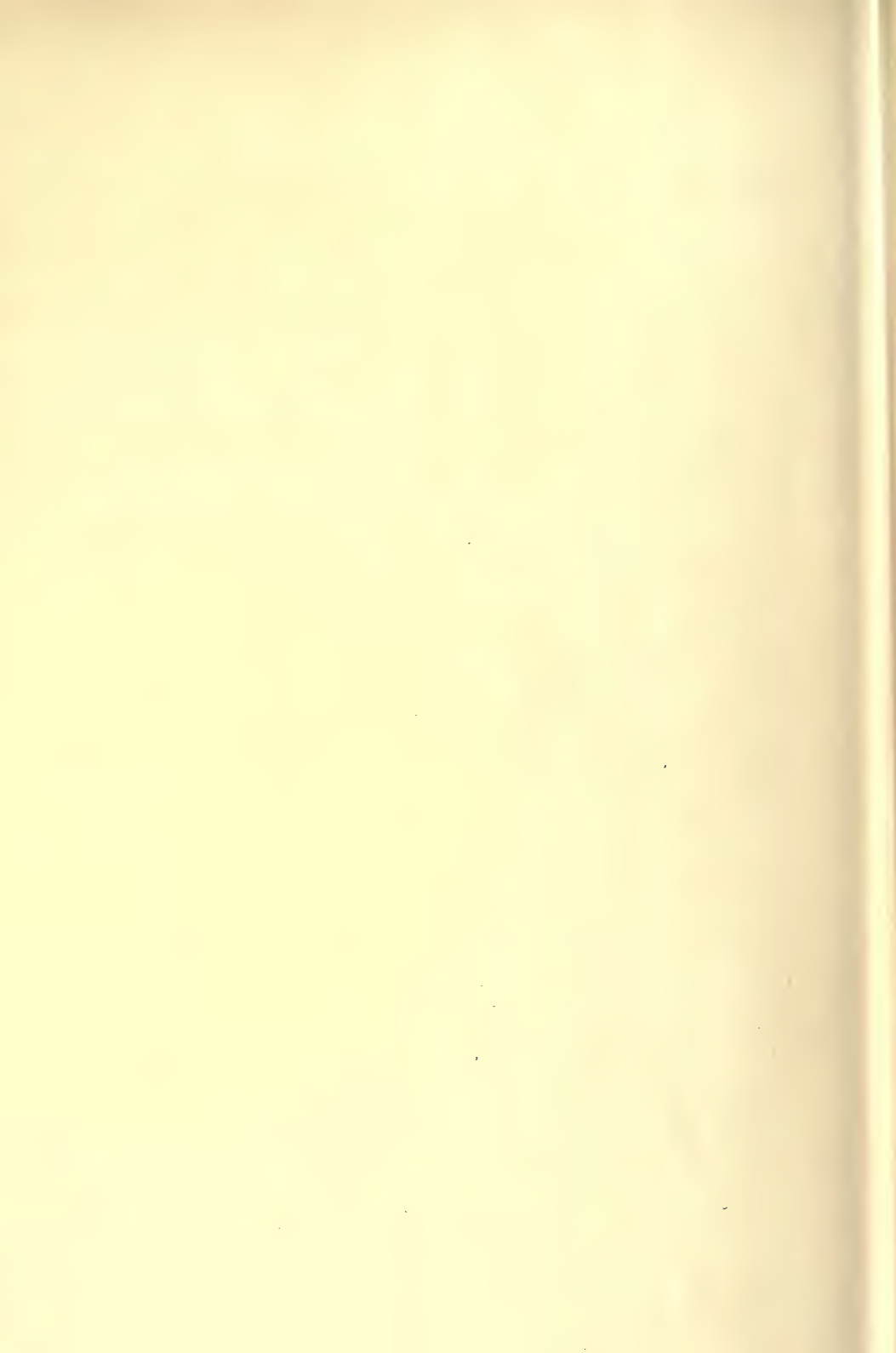


DOWNHOLLAND HALL, NEAR ORMSKIRK.





OAKWELL HALL, (1583). SHOWING DOG-GATES.





GREAT KEWLANDS, BURHAM, KENT (1599.)





RESTORATION HOUSE, ROCHESTER, UPPER STAIR.



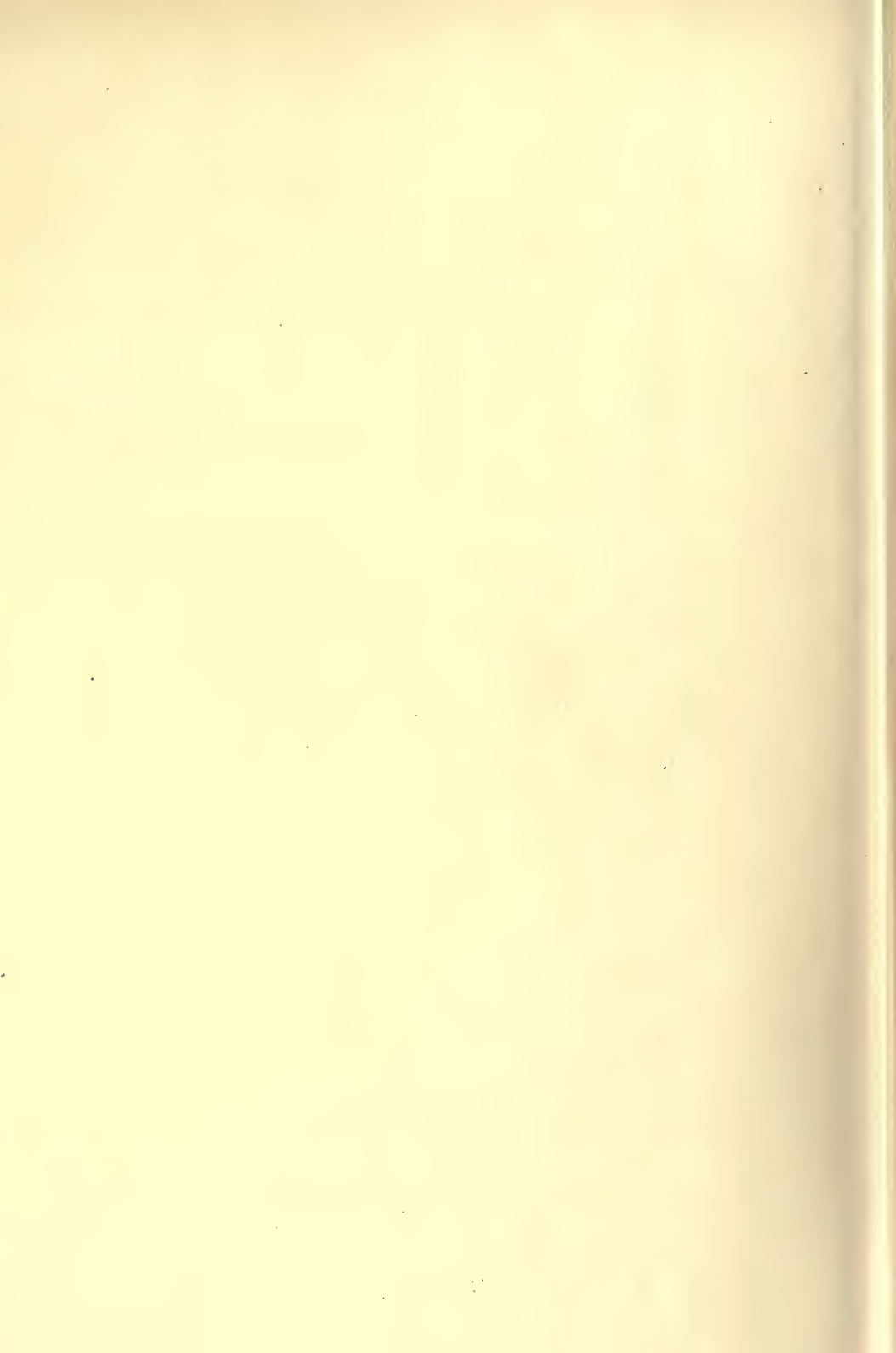


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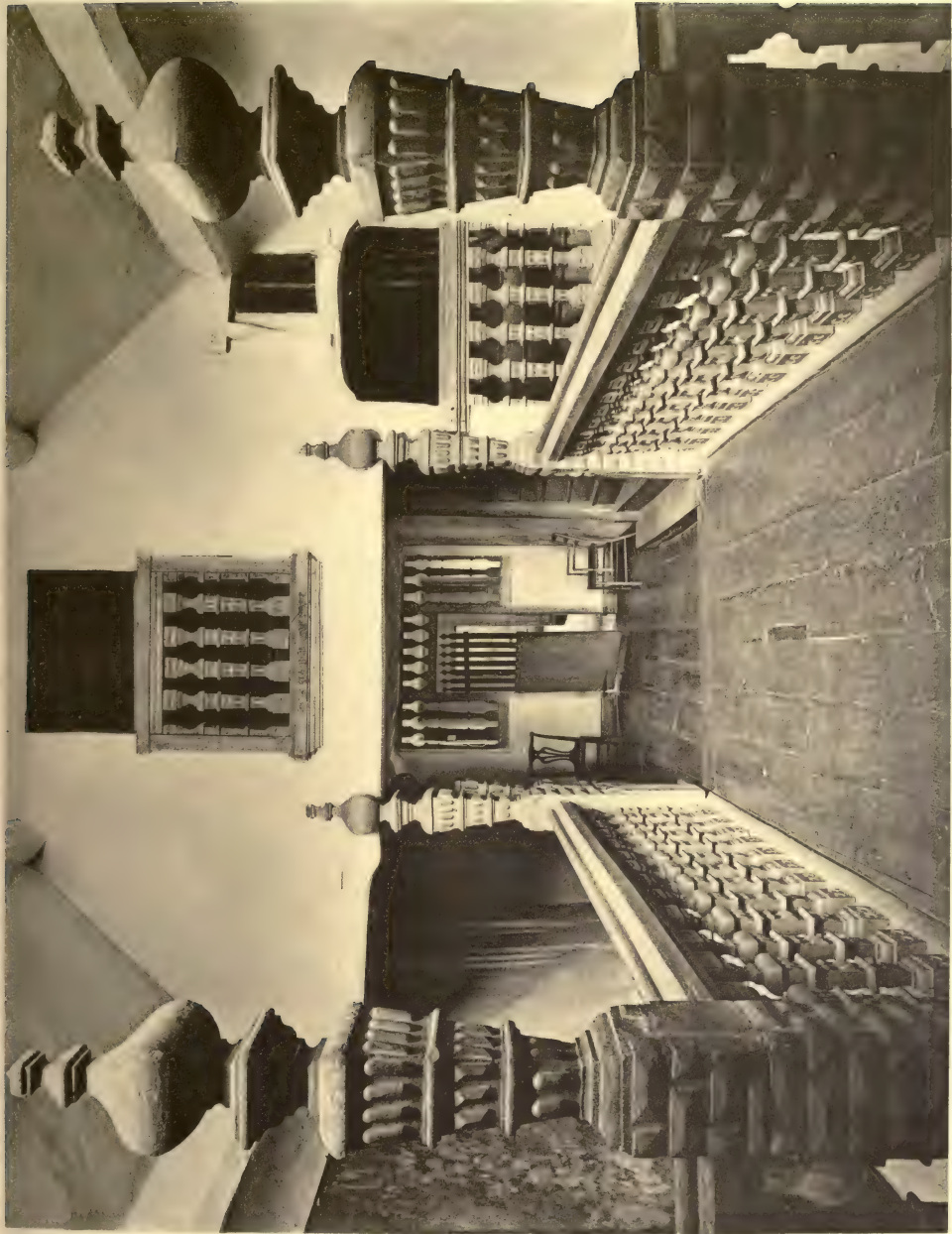
HATFIELD HOUSE, HERTFORDSHIRE (1612).





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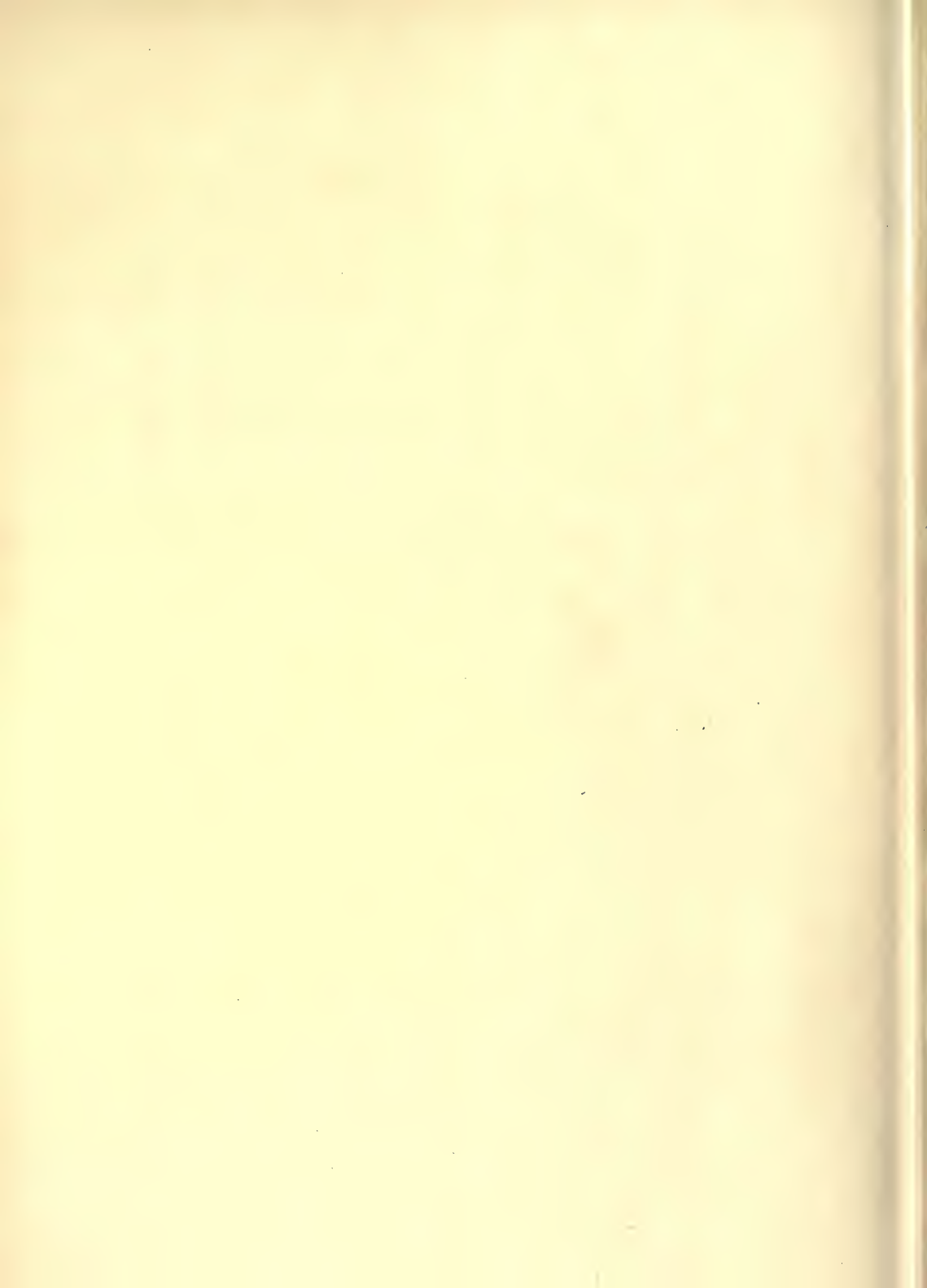


ASTON HALL (1618-35), WARWICKSHIRE.





RAWDON HOUSE, HODDESDON, (1622).





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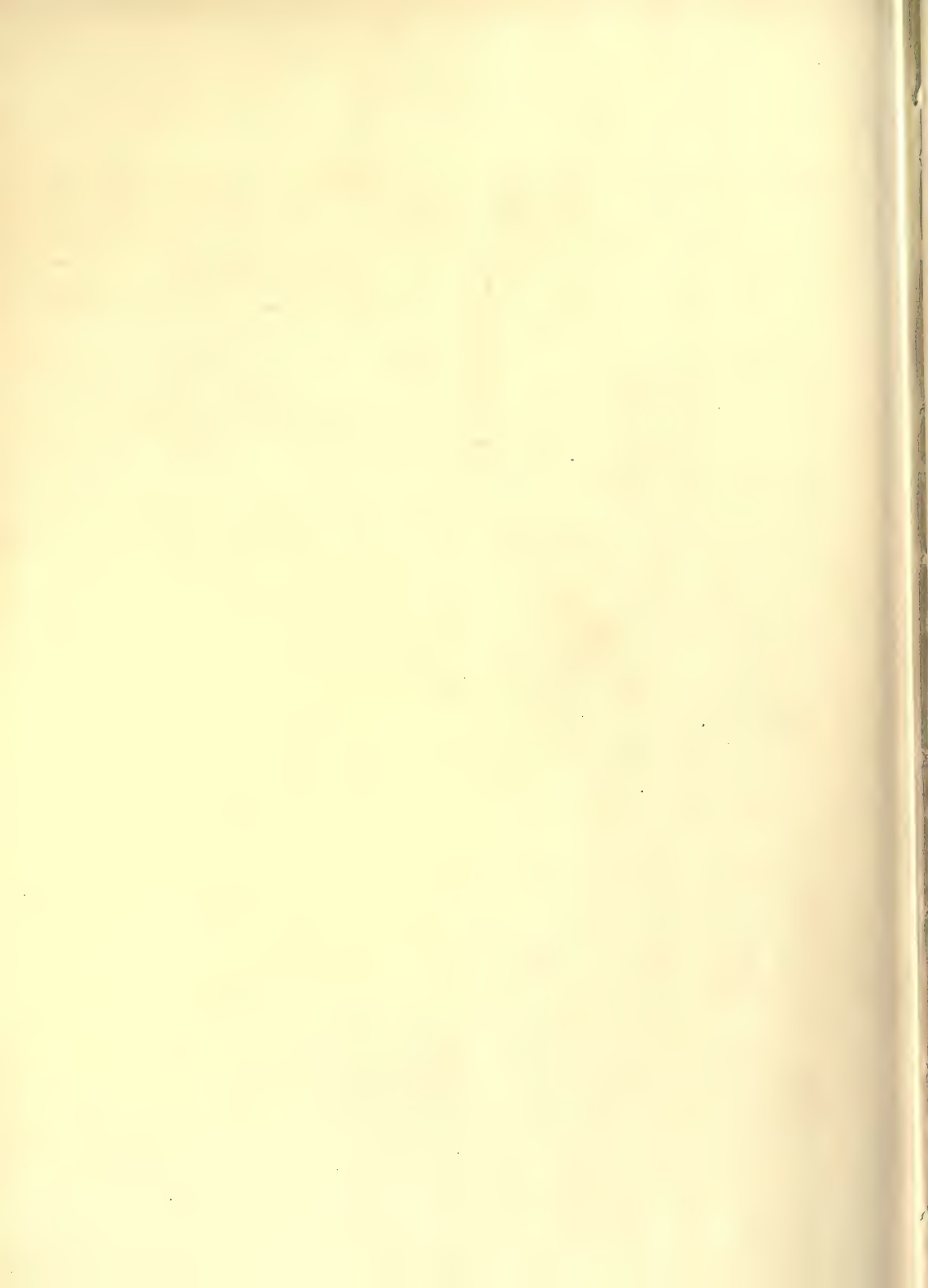


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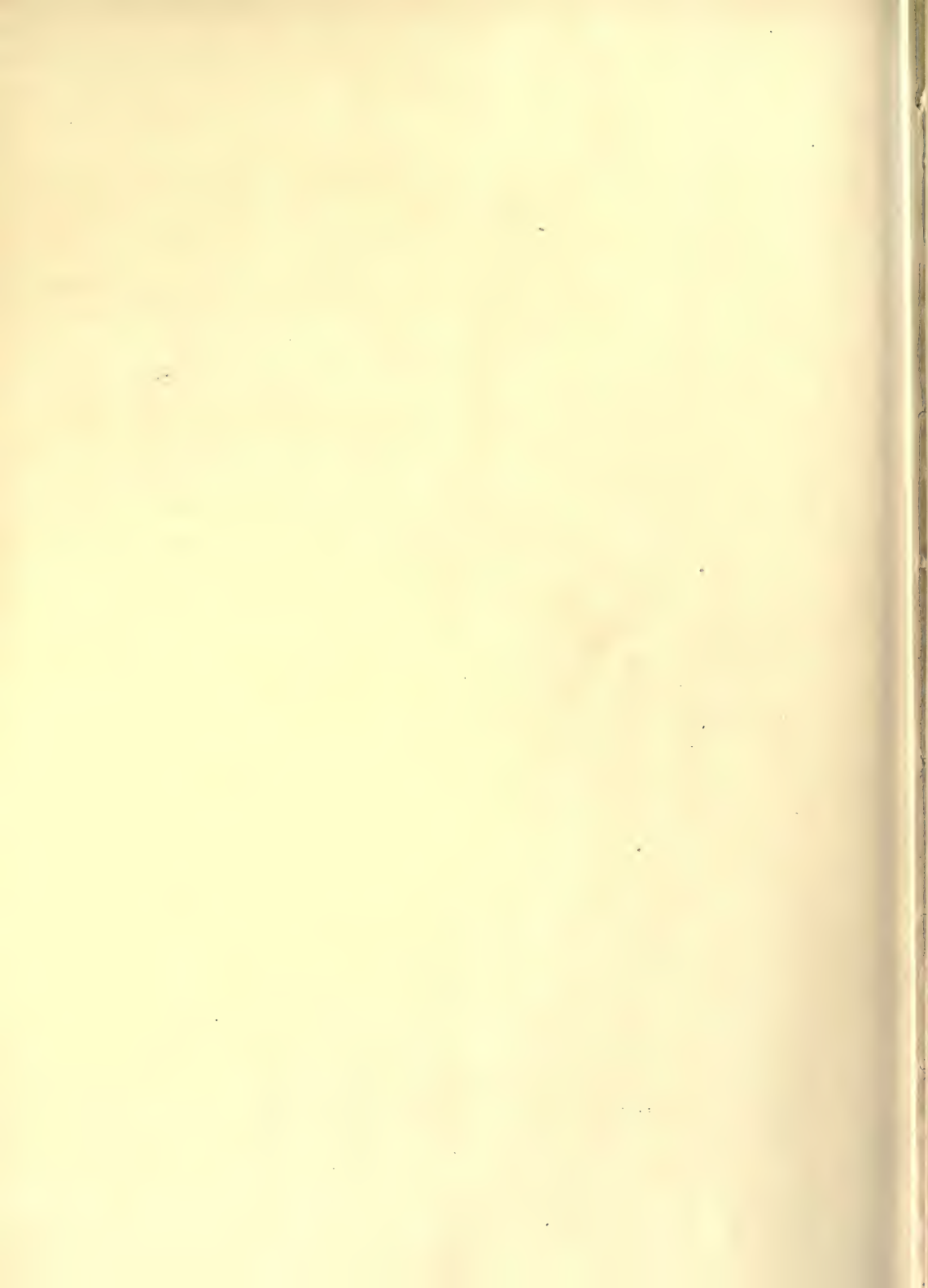


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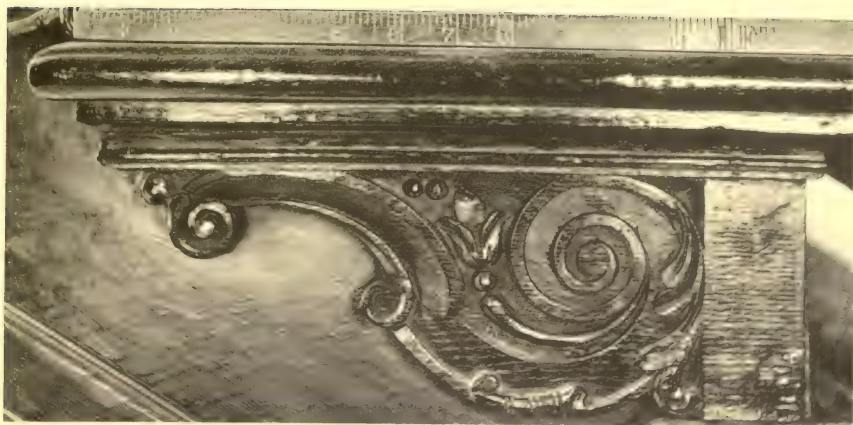
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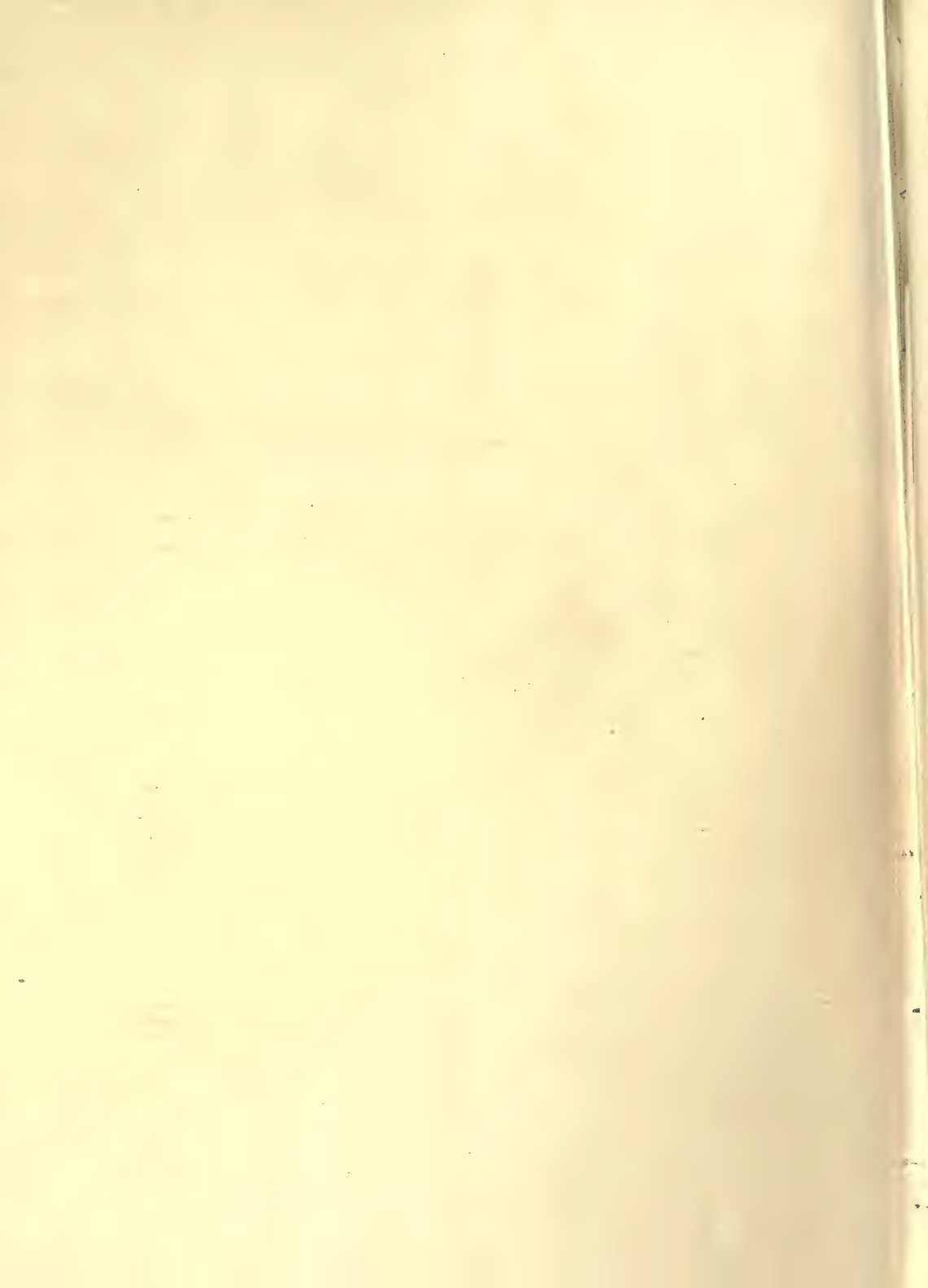
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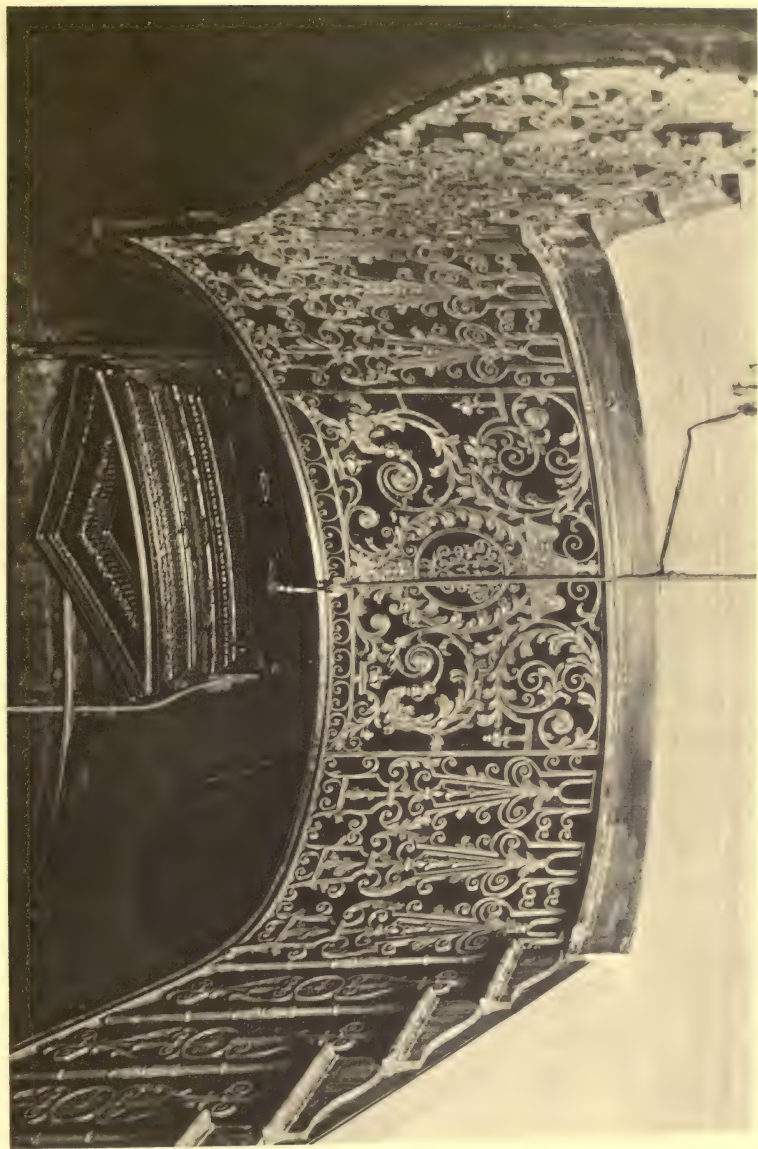
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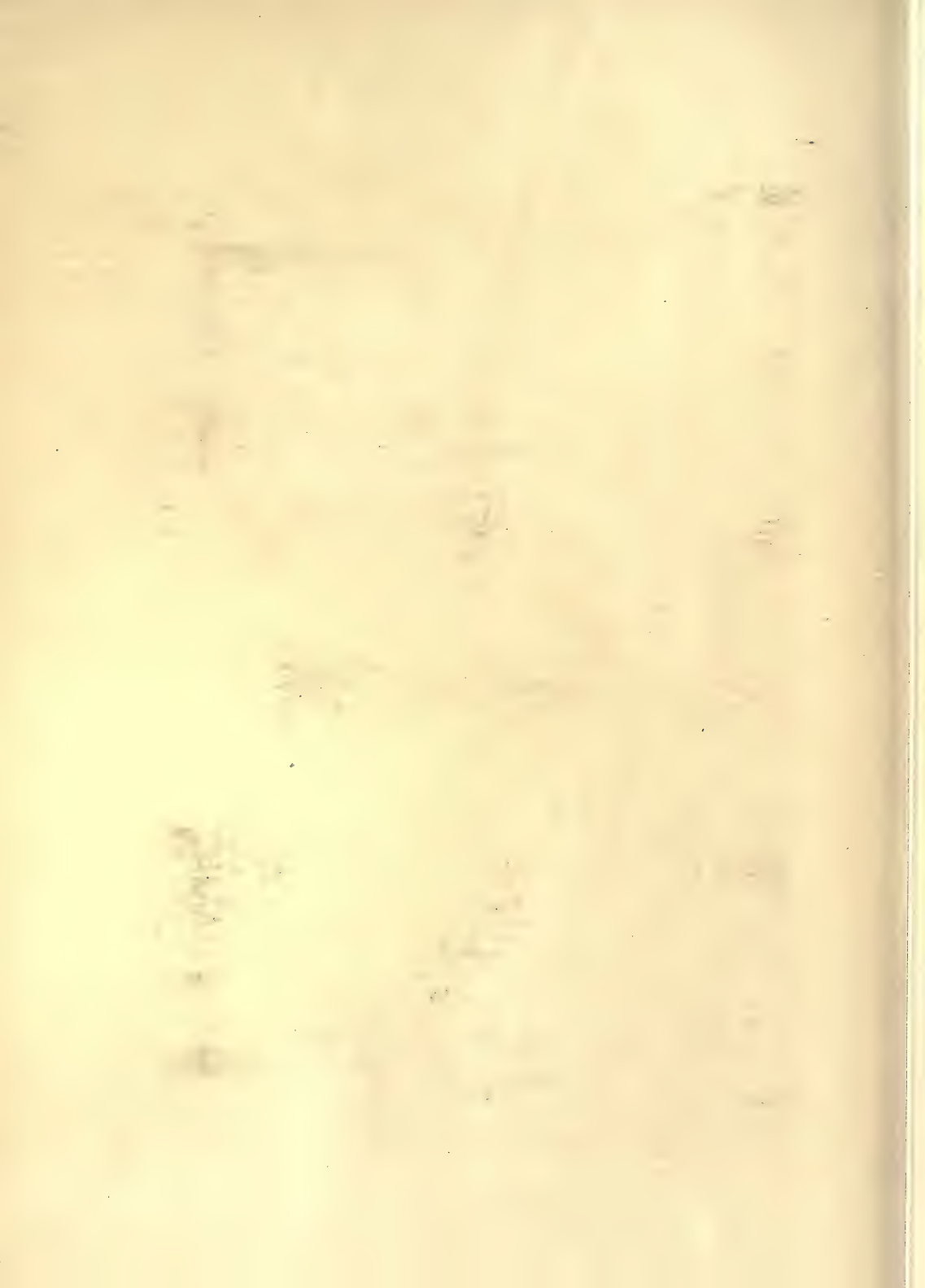


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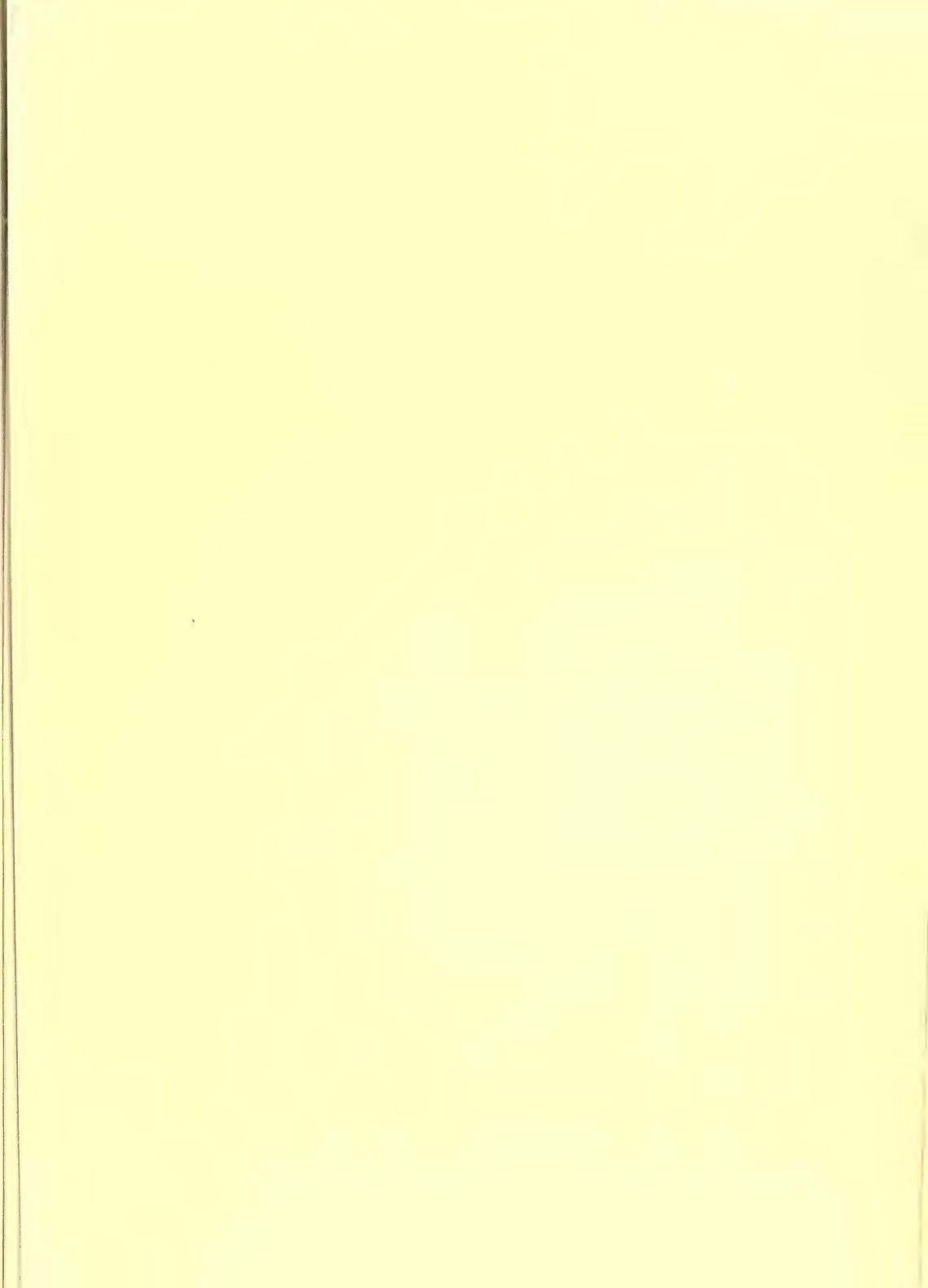
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