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Brereton Hall (before the removal of the Cupolas)

by P. de Wint

THE
STORY OF BRERETON HALL
CESHIRE

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BROMFIELD PRIORY AND CHURCH IN SHROPSHIRE.
CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS.
TWELVE ADVENTURES OF ST. PAUL.
ETC.

2nd Edition.—JANUARY, 1949.

CHESTER :
PHILLIPSON AND GOLDER LTD.

1363991

TO THE FAMILY OF BRERETON

and

TO THE STAFF AND SCHOLARS OF BRERETON HALL
SCHOOL

*From the late Sir Allen Mawer, M.A., Litt.D., F.B.A.,
Provost of University College, London,
and Director of the English Place-Names Survey.*

Dear Arthur Moir,

I trust that your *Story of Brereton Hall* will give as much pleasure to others as it did to one who was privileged to spend a year there when it was in the thoughtful care of your father and mother.

Cheshire is famous for its great houses and historic families. You have told the story of one of its smaller houses and of a great family destined to die out all too soon. You have told a story of stirring deeds and troublous times against a background of quiet and unchanging beauty.

You have given us a glimpse of what remains of the treasures of the Hall and of the rural setting of an Elizabethan house which still preserves much that is characteristic. For all this we owe you a debt of gratitude.

I am,

Yours sincerely,

ALLEN MAWER.

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PREFACE

This account of Brereton Hall has been written in order to preserve its records and traditions, which seemed likely to be lost at a time when the estate was changing hands.

The principal sources of information, which the writer gratefully acknowledges, are these:—

The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester, by George Ormerod, L.L.D., F.R.S., and F.S.A., 1819.

The Breretons of Cheshire, 1100-1904 A.D., by Robert Maitland Brereton, M.I.C.E., Woodstock, Oregon.

An anonymous article in "Country Life," September 18th, 1909.

MSS by Mrs. Sewell, of Manchester, who claimed descent from the Breretons. MSS dated December 31st, 1898.

A printed account by an anonymous author, in the 19th century.

Thanks are due to the late Lord Leigh and the Honourable Agnes Leigh, of Stoneleigh Abbey and Grosvenor Square, London, for their kindness in giving the story of the stained glass of Brereton, now the property of Lord Leigh.

The events of more recent times have been written largely from the personal recollections and researches of the writer and his parents, the late Mr. and Mrs. Moir, who occupied Brereton Hall from 1891-1922.

Mrs. Moir being a friend of Mrs. Howard, the owner of the Hall, learnt much that would otherwise have been lost.

The writer himself was brought up from earliest childhood at the Hall and heard from residents in the neighbourhood stories and traditions handed down from their forefathers.

This account was first written in 1922, published in 1938, with a second edition in 1949.

It is a matter of great interest that Mr. P. W. Montague-Smith, 26, Lancaster Park, Richmond, Surrey, who claims lineal descent from the Breretons, is collecting material for a history of the Brereton Family.

We are indebted to him for information on Miss Estelle Brereton's researches as to the identity of Lady Ada, alleged wife of Sir Radulph Brereton, and also for particulars about Sir William Brereton, executed in connection with the Anne Boleyn episode.

We are grateful to the Editor of *Country Life* for his courtesy in giving permission for the reproduction of photographs of Brereton Hall, to Messrs. Raphael Tuck for the view of Aston Hall, and also to Mr. Crosse, of Whitchurch, Salop, for his photographs of the old prints of Rock Savage, and the window with the Nine Earls.

Care has been taken to obtain historical accuracy, but this account has been written with an attempt to avoid too many historical and genealogical statistics, or technical, heraldic and architectural terms. It is just the story of Brereton Hall, simply told, in the hope that the generations to come may not forget the years that are past.

CHAPTER 1.

THE MEDIÆVAL BRERETONS.

THE old Hall stands serene, stately and silent. Its silence is a challenge. Who can find out its safely guarded secrets of the past? Who built it? Who lived here and loved the old place? Who can tell of the pomp and pride, yes, and of sad and sorrowing hearts in historic Brereton Hall?

Twin octagonal towers guard the main entrance, the Church at its side peeps out of the trees, the river Croco flows peacefully in front, an impressive picture.

In the days of Queen Elizabeth Brereton Hall, near Sandbach, in Cheshire, was built in all its splendour. But this was not the beginning of its story. Brereton had even then a history of at least five hundred years. The suggestion has been made but is impossible, that the Brereton family is descended from Breton, who came over with William the Conqueror and whose family is commemorated in mural monuments in Rouen Cathedral. The first definite reference to Brereton is in the Domesday Survey ordered by the Conqueror. There it is recorded that the manor of Bretune (Brereton) was one of the six dependencies of Kinderton, which Gilbert de Venables obtained at the time of the Conquest. The name Venables is derived from the Latin "Venator abilis," the skilful hunter, which gives a hint as to the spirit of the times. Kinderton was at Middlewich.

Soon after the Domesday Survey, Brereton was granted to a family which took the name of the place. In early days there is a variety of spelling such as Bretune, Breto, Breton, Brerton, Breerton.

No doubt the Breretons were closely connected with the Lords of Kinderton for their arms are similar, the Brereton arms two bars sable on field argent differing from them only in tincture, or colour.

The Baron of Kinderton had in his own demesne almost as much power as the Earl of Chester, having the power of life and death over his tenants.

About 1100 Ralph de Brereton signed his name as witness to a deed by Gilbert Venables. But that is all we know of him. The pedigree of the family begins with William de Brereton of Brereton, 1175.

William became the recurring family name. It would be tedious to record the various William Breretons, or attempt to discriminate between them. The Brereton family from 1175 onwards played a prominent part in the county, and even in national affairs.

It is supposed—but of this more will be said later—that Sir Ranulphus de Brereton, living in 1272, married Lady Ada, third daughter of David, Earl of Huntingdon, widow of Sir Henry de Hasting. From her father Lady Ada traced descent from the royal Scottish line to David I, King of Scotland, and on her mother's side was connected with the Earls of Chester, and so with William the Conqueror.

The ancient canopied tomb at Astbury states in Latin "Here lie Radulph Brereton, Knight, and the Lady Ada his wife, one of the daughters of David Huntingdon," but there is doubt as to the authenticity of this inscription.

A more tangible benefit than royal descent came to the family when Sir William Brereton in the reign of Edward III married an heiress. He married Ellen, daughter of Philip, sister and finally heiress of David de Egerton, of Egerton, representative of the Norman barons of Malpas. Through this he became Baron of Malpas. Their eldest son was born at Egerton in 1350, and baptised at Malpas. Eventually he went to the French wars, and helped to win France for King Henry V. Randle, the youngest son, by a second marriage,

became the ancestor of the branch of the Brereton family resident at Malpas Hall. But where was Egerton? The family deriving its name from the place constantly recurs in Cheshire records.

Ormerod describes Egerton (in Vol. 2, page 349) "The township of Egerton lies immediately adjacent to Cholmondeley, about one mile north-east of the 13th milestone on the Whitchurch road from Chester, in a low sequestered situation, on the banks of a small rivulet, which is one of the sources of the Weaver. Oulton was selected as the residence of the manorial lords of this place in Leland's time, and Egerton Hall, after being long abandoned to decay, is now completely destroyed, and its moated area, of about a statute acre, is levelled with the plough. Within this moat, which is supplied by the stream before-mentioned, stands the ancient chapel of Egerton, retaining its pointed east window, and fragments of architecture which indicate its original purpose, but completely desecrated, and used as a common barn."

The heiress of Egerton married Sir William Brereton, and had a son, also named William. When he grew up he married Anylla, daughter of Sir William Venables. The marriage took place at Audlem in 1386, and because the bride and bridegroom were related through mutual descent from Sir Ralph Vernon, the marriage was confirmed by a dispensation granted by Richard de Donnes, Prior of the Carmelites of Chester.

There follows an inglorious period of feuds in the county, the most deadly being with the Davenports of Davenport. The cause of these disputes is not known, generally it was due to jealousy, and quarrels would arise on some point of etiquette or question of precedence. Such was the case between Moreton of Moreton, and Rode, which a Sir William Brereton was asked to adjudicate. The problem was "Which should sitt

highest in the Church (i.e., the Parish Church of Astbury) and foremost goo in procession."

Sir William had the assistance of "a jury of most auncient men" and gave the verdict that he should sit highest who could "dispense out of inherited lands the most income."

This Sir William was probably owner of Malpas Hall and perhaps that gentleman of the King's Household in Henry VIII's reign, who met with a grim fate, and in 1536 was executed on Tower Hill with others on charges in connection with the Queen, Anne Boleyn.

At Brereton, Sir William succeeded Sir William with monotonous regularity. Sir William Brereton, who married at Audlem in 1386, has been mentioned. His grandson's grandson also named Sir William became famous for his exploits in Ireland during Fitzgerald's rebellion. "In 1534," writes the chronicler Holinshed, "he with his son John Brereton was inshored at Howth with two hundred and fifty soldiers well appointed. The same year he was sent by the Lord Deputy to summon the Castle of Maynooth, which had been strongly fortified. He scaled the walls with his men and ran up to the highest turret of the castle, and advanced his standard to the top thereof, notifienge to the deputy that the fort was woone."

Another achievement was his subduing of a conspiracy of O'Connor, at the Hill of Fowre, in Westmeath.

Sir William had become a power in Irish affairs, and was made Lord Justice, and High Marshall. But being sent, the chronicler records to Limerick against "James, Earl of Desmond, who stood certain tickle points with the governor, he ended his life in that jounie, and lieth entoomed at Kilkennie in the quier of Saint Kennie, his church."

A sentimental interest attaches to the exploit at Maynooth, for in the chancel of Brereton Church, hangs a suit of armour, without explanation or description. Mrs. Sewell, who claimed connection with the Brereton family, wrote in 1898, "On the walls of Brereton Church still hang the remains of the banner that Sir William planted on the turret of Maynooth Castle, declaring the fort to be wonne; the suit of armour he wore on that day is now in a dilapidated condition."*

Here ends a chapter in the story of the Brereton family, another chapter tells of new honours, and the new home.

*NOTE.—The writer dimly remembers the tattered silk hanging from the wall in the chancel, but it has disappeared. The writer's father in his capacity as Churchwarden of Brereton Church had the armour restored from its dilapidated condition and cleaned by experts, about 1905. The writer visited the Egerton Chapel in 1938, and found it standing as described by Ormerod, but in a much more dilapidated condition.

CHAPTER 2.

THE LORDS OF BRERETON.

What a pathetic figure! A little boy barely ten years old, his father not long dead, his mother married again, and he himself handed over to the care of a guardian. His grandfather, famous for military exploits in Ireland, lay buried in the Church of Kilkenny, and was not that his armour hanging in the chancel of Brereton Church? This boy was the new Sir William Brereton.

Here are the cold facts. He was born and baptised at Brereton in 1550. His father, Sir William, was buried at Brereton on September 4th, 1559. His mother, Jane, eldest daughter of Sir Peter Warburton, was married for the second time to Sir Lawrence Smith at Brereton, on January 20th, 1560 or 1561 (let us hope it was 1561). On the occasion of this marriage the boy was given over to be a ward of Sir John Savage of Clifton, near Runcorn, in Cheshire.

Little Sir William would not be lonely for he had a friend and playmate in Margaret, daughter of Sir John Savage and his wife, Lady Elizabeth, daughter of the Earl of Rutland. The girl would be about a year younger than the boy.

The two children must have been thrilled watching the building of a mansion, which Sir John Savage was erecting in place of the old hall of his ancestors. It was a romantic site, perched on a crag. Behind was Halton Castle, over the River Weaver was a view of the hills of Wales, at the side the waters of Weaver joined the estuary of the Mersey, bound for the open sea.

Gradually the old Clifton Hall disappeared, and the new hall, later called Rock Savage, took its place. Instead of being of wood and plaster the building was of brick and stone, with all the latest Tudor ideas in the matter of architecture. In the centre twin towers marked the main entrance.

How delighted William and Margaret must have been to see the work completed, in 1568, and go to live in the new home.

But by that time they were no longer children, but had reached the age of romance, and it is not surprising to find that soon after his coming of age, which was in 1571, Sir William Brereton married Margaret Savage, his guardian's daughter. She received a marriage portion of 1,000 marks.

Unromantic persons may suggest that the marriage was a shrewd match-making scheme on the part of the guardian. Possibly it was, but lovers of romance find a romantic element in the marriage. Sir William determined he would give his wife a home like the one she was leaving, and which they had together watched being built. So he set to work to re-build his ancestral home at Brereton, and took Rock Savage as his model. Only a gaunt fragment of a wall remains of the glories of Rock Savage, but a sketch of the central part when in fair preservation clearly shews that this was the pattern from which Brereton Hall was copied, and there are similar octagonal towers on each side of the entrance.

In the Cheshire Plain, set in park land where giant beeches grow, Sir William rebuilt his home, by the side of the Church ancient even at that time, and with a little river in front flowing till it would join the River Weaver, and flow on past the mansion of Rock Savage, looking upon the archetype of Brereton Hall, before finding its way to the sea.

The most striking feature of Brereton Hall was the pair of octagonal towers, in the centre, crowned with copper cupolas.

Sir William lavishly decorated the exterior and interior with armorial bearings and heraldic devices. Especially prominent were the Royal Arms, in honour

of Queen Elizabeth, with her "supporters" the lion and dragon, also the Tudor rose, and Beaufort portcullis, and the lion mask reminiscent of the Egerton lion rampant. The date was clearly engraved in stone, 1585.

This was the home of Sir William for nearly 45 years. In 1624 he was made Lord Brereton of Leighlin, and died in 1630 at the age of 81.

Lord Brereton's three elder sons had failed to grow to manhood, and the fourth, Sir John, died a few months before his father, leaving a youth of nineteen, who became the second Lord Brereton, in 1630. At the age of 22 Lord Brereton married Elizabeth, daughter of George Goring.

Now George Goring was a remarkable character. Celebrated at court as a wit, famous as a Cavalier leader in the Civil War, he was raised to the Earldom of Norwich. He had a share in negotiating the marriage of King Charles I with Henrietta Maria. He took over the Mulberry Gardens in London from Lord Aston, and established Goring House there. Later this house changed its name, with successive owners, becoming Arlington House, Buckingham House, Queen's House and finally Buckingham Palace. Though George Goring had an income in 1641 estimated at £26,000 a year when he died in 1662 he left only £450 a year to his heir. Such was the father-in-law of the second Lord Brereton!

In Brereton Hall a mantel-piece in the dressing-room off Lord Brereton's bedroom celebrates the marriage of Elizabeth Goring with Lord Brereton. It is dated 1633, and above the date, flanked by the Brereton bear and wolf supporters and topped by a crested helm, is a shield on which the Brereton bars impale the Goring chevron between three annulets. The Brereton motto is conspicuous "Opitulante Deo," "God



Rock Savage

by P. de Wint



By courtesy of "Country Life"

The Main Entrance of Brereton Hall
(after the removal of the Cupolas)

being my helper." Twelve minor shields record the arms of Lady Ada, the Earls of Chester, and other families. These are reproduced from a monument set up in 1618 in Brereton Church by the first Lord.

At one side of the mantel-piece is the figure of a man, with the Brereton arms imposed, and on the other the figure of a lady, with the Goring chevron, presumably the bridegroom and his bride.

In the next year, 1634, three bells with inscriptions were hung in the Church, perhaps also in honour of this marriage.

A little zest may have been added to the celebrations owing to the fact that the marriage must have caused intense annoyance to the Breretons at Malpas, who were not friendly disposed towards the Royal Family, or to the generals in the King's Army. There was animosity between the family at Brereton and the branch at Malpas.

These marriage festivities at Brereton were doomed to have a calamitous sequel. Lord Brereton, always loyal to the Crown, was more closely bound to the King by this marriage with the daughter of the courtier-general George Goring.

His relative however, Sir William Brereton, of the Malpas branch, held opposite views. Just a century ago his ancestor, also Sir William, had been ruthlessly executed by Henry VIII in connection with the Anne Boleyn episode, and naturally had no love for Kings but adopted strong Parliamentary views.

In 1642 came the clash of arms. Civil war broke out between Royalists and Roundheads. This gave Sir William Brereton of Malpas a chance of proving his military ability. He was a man of experience, having travelled much in early manhood. He was made a commander of the Parliamentary forces, and early in 1644 defeated the Royal Army, and relieved Nantwich.

Then he advanced on Brereton. There is a tradition that he besieged his relative there. Whether Lord Brereton waited within the walls for a siege or not, is uncertain, but the conclusion was that the royalist lord fled from Brereton Hall with his wife and son to Bid-dulph Hall in Staffordshire, which was fortified. The defence of the Hall was valiant and persistent.

It was said that the young heir of Brereton scratched on one of the window panes in the Hall the defiant verse, found in an old ballad—

“On yonder hill my uncle stands
But he will not come near
For he is a roundhead
And I am a cavalier.”

At the end of three months the besieging forces, still being unsuccessful, fetched from Stafford a large cannon called “Roaring Meg,” which was first planted on the west side. The gun was next tried on the rising ground on the east side, the country people having informed the General that this was the weakest side of the Hall.

The old record states that from this side the artillery-men battered furiously for some time, then at last a cannon ball accidentally struck the end of a beam supporting the Hall thus giving the building such a shake that its defenders thought it would have fallen down. Thereupon Lady Brereton was so much affrighted that at her earnest entreaties the place was surrendered, on February 20th, 1644. Lord and Lady Brereton and their son and heir, with Captains Bid-dulph, Shackerley and Minshull and about 150 soldiers were carried prisoners to Stafford.

Lord Brereton was compelled to pay for his release what was a large sum in those days, the exact figure being given as £1,738 18s. 0d.

The boy William would be only about 13 or 14 when he made that adventurous flight with his father and mother from Brereton to Biddulph. No doubt he had seen enough of war, and took to study instead. He may have shewn signs of special ability, for a few years later his grandfather, now Earl of Norwich, saw that he went abroad to Holland for his education.

When he was a youth about 19 his portrait was painted possibly by Cornelius Janssen, or else by a local Dutch artist.

He married Frances, daughter of Francis, Lord Willoughby of Parham and had three sons, John, William and Francis.

In 1664 his father died, and he became the third Lord Brereton. He was a man of learning and influence and is considered a founder of the Royal Society, and was as Sprat informs us, one of a number of learned and eminent persons who held meetings at Gresham College, previous to the Royal Society being incorporated.

A selection of original letters preserved in the Bodleian Library mentions his talents and acquirements. His death took place in London in 1679, and he was buried in St. Martin's-in-the-Fields.

His son John, the fourth Lord Brereton, died childless in 1718, and his brother William having died, was succeeded by his other brother Francis, the fifth Lord, who died in 1722, a bachelor.

So the direct male line of the Breretons of Brereton Hall ceased, after holding the estate for six hundred years, and the title Lord Brereton became extinct.

CHAPTER 3.

THE BARONETS OF ASTON HALL.

“Sir Thomas Holte took a cleever, and hytt his cook with the same cleever upon the headde, and clave his headde, that one syde thereof fell upon one of his shoulders, and the other side on the other shoulder and this I will verifie to be trewe”—so said the scandal-monger of a byegone age. The particulars of proceedings against this slander are recorded in the Plea Rolls (5 James I, Easter Term, roll 462).

There is a similar tradition of a valet in the Brereton family coming to an untimely end. Misguided moralists have been tempted to point to the bloody hand on the Holte escutcheon, and to the muzzled bear of the Breretons as the heraldic penalty for their crimes. In reality the “red hand” (of Ulster) originated early in the seventeenth century when James I created Knights Baronet to induce the English gentry to settle in the province of Ulster. “The arms of Baronets are distinguished by an augmentation of a human hand gules, borne on an escutcheon in the centre or chief of the shield,” says the text-book on heraldry.

The Sir Thomas Holte, of the cleever case, was the founder of an Elizabethan mansion, Aston Hall, in Warwickshire. This residence built in the country is now within the confines of the City of Birmingham, and is a civic museum and art gallery, and has given its name to the famous football club and ground within its original demesne, Aston Villa.

An inscription on an ornamental panel at the entrance of the Hall runs as follows:—

“Sir Thomas Holte of Duddeston in the Countie of Warwick Knight and Baronet began to build this House in Aprill in Anno Domini 1618, in the 16th year of the raigne of King James of England, etc., and of Scotland the one and fiftieth, and the said Sir Thomas Holte came to dwell in this House in May in Anno Domini 1631, in the seventh year of the



Raphael Tuck Copyright

Aston Hall



raigne of our souveraigne Lord King Charles, and he did finish this house in Aprill Anno Domini 1635: in the eleventh year of the raigne of the said King Charles.

LAUS DEO."

The mansion when completed was impressive in its grandeur, typically Elizabethan, with slightly projecting centre and more pronounced projecting wings giving an E formation. There were bold windows with decorative parapets, towers with cupolas, and a courtyard.

A few years later the loyal Sir Thomas Holte entertained King Charles I, on the eve of dramatic events in the memorable year 1642. It was a Sunday evening that the King arrived with Lord Lindsay and Lord Falkland in his company, and was welcomed by Sir Thomas to his "poor house of Aston." The King was marching from Shrewsbury to relieve Banbury Castle. He slept two nights at Aston Hall on the way, and on the next Sunday the Battle of Edge Hill was fought. The Civil War had begun, and Charles I was beginning to tread the way that led to the scaffold.

Just after Christmas the next year, 1643, other visitors came. The Roundheads, one thousand strong, assaulted the place, and the marks of their cannon are still to be seen.

Aston Hall and its owner suffered heavily through the Civil War, but Sir Thomas had compensations, he was the father of fifteen children!

A year or two passed and instead of war there was a wedding. Robert, a grandson of Sir Thomas, married a lady from Cheshire. She was Jane Brereton, granddaughter of the first Lord Brereton, who built Brereton Hall.

Here is the first link between Brereton Hall and Aston Hall. Poor Jane! Her marriage was of tragic brevity, though of far-reaching consequences. She was married in 1646, and within two years, at the birth of a baby son, she died.

No one would have guessed that Jane Brereton, married to Robert Holte and dead within two years, would have any influence on the Brereton inheritance. Her brother became Lord Brereton, and had five sons; the eldest son and two grandsons succeeding to the title.

Important issues depended on the life of the motherless infant of Robert Holte. The child grew up and became the second baronet, Sir Charles Holte. He was succeeded by Sir Clobery Holte, who was succeeded in turn by his two inseparable sons, Charles and Lister.

On the death of the last Lord Brereton in 1722 the male line became extinct, and Brereton Hall passed through the female line, that is through Jane Brereton to her descendants the Holtes of Aston Hall, and through the female line to Abraham Bracebridge in 1782.

Ormerod gives the facts as follows:—John, fourth Lord Brereton, and Francis, fifth Lord Brereton, his brother having died issueless (the latter in 1722) Brereton passed to the Holtes of Aston in Warwickshire, in right of Jane, wife of Sir Robert Holte, daughter of Sir William Brereton, and great-aunt, and finally heir of Lord Francis, which Jane died in 1648. Under the will of Sir Lister Holte, Bart., (died October 12th, 1769) the manors of Brereton and Aston with other estates were settled on his brother Sir Charles Holte for life, remainder to his issue, remainder to Heneage Legge, Esq., with similar remainder; remainder to Lewis Bagot, clerk (successively bishop of Norwich and St. Asaph, who died s.p.) with similar remainder; remainder to Wriothesley Digby, Esq., with similar remainder:

remainder to the right heirs of Sir Lister Holte, with authority to the persons successively seized to grant leases of the Cheshire estates for one life and for 12 months after.

Sir Charles Holte left issue one daughter, Mary Elizabeth, representative of the families of Holte and Brereton, and of the eldest line of Egerton of Egerton, and her husband Abraham Bracebridge, Esqre., had leases of Brereton Hall and demesne, and of other parcels of the estate (to which his wife was ultimately heir) from Heneage Legge Esqre., who succeeded on the death of Sir Charles Holte to the estates comprehended in the will of Sir Lister Holte."

This formal and legal language of Ormerod makes dull reading, except to those who are connected with, or have some special interest in the families mentioned.

We may sum up by saying that on the death of the last Lord Brereton in 1722 the estate of Brereton Hall passed into the female line, and was in the hands of the Holtes and Bracebridges for a hundred years.

Washington Irving's well known book "Bracebridge Hall" is supposed to refer to Brereton Hall, Brereton being thinly disguised under the name of its occupier, Bracebridge. The description of the Hall is not accurate, but that would be intentional, as it might not be advisable to give too literal a description of the Hall and its life there, in the lifetime of its occupants.

The book gives a delightful sketch of what life was like in a country Hall of the 18th century—most probably based upon the life that went on in the Hall, the home of Abraham Bracebridge, Esq.

With this century passed another phase in the history of the Hall, and the last connecting link with the

Brereton was finally severed when in 1817 an Act of Parliament was obtained for the dismemberment of the estates, to satisfy the claims of assignees.

Brereton Hall was no longer the home of the Breretons, and the claims of the Baronets of Aston Hall upon it ceased.

CHAPTER 4.

CHANGES.

In the "Times" of September 18th, 1817, appeared this advertisement, "A very valuable and highly important FREEHOLD ESTATE, together with the extensive Manor and Advowson of the Rectory of Brereton, the latter estimated at £1,000 per annum, with chief rents, quit rents, courts, etc., situate in the parish of Brereton, in the county of Chester, on the high road to Liverpool, about 160 miles from London—the estate is nearly in a ring fence and comprises the whole parish of Brereton, except one farm, a capital spacious mansion called Brereton Hall, seated in a park of considerable extent, in which are two fine sheets of water, and about 1,100 acres of land attached, and of value of nearly £2,000 per annum."

The sale was to take place "by Mr. Adamson, at the Auction Mart, in a few weeks."

This advertisement followed an Act of Parliament dated 10th July, 1817. "Cap. 38. An Act for confirming an Agreement relating to the Reversion expectant of certain Estates in the Counties of Warwick and Chester, late of Sir Lister Holte, Baronet, deceased, and property belonging to Abraham Bracebridge Esquire, and for vesting such Estates and Property in Trustees, to convey and assure the same according to the said Agreement."

The Act directed the Aston and Brereton property to be sold, and the money to be paid to various creditors. Aston Hall with its park was sold in this year to a firm of bankers in Warwick, and was eventually converted into a Museum and Art Gallery.

It is presumed that at Brereton neither the property or advowson were sold by public auction, and the tradition is held that the property was in the care of a lawyer, comfortably residing at the Hall, who attempted to dissuade intending purchasers by hinting at a missing link to the title of the estate, which would invalidate the purchase. This went on for about two years. Then Mr. John Howard, of Newton, near Hyde, in Cheshire, took the risk, paid for the property in hard cash, and took possession.

When Mr. Howard bought Brereton Hall he found

CHANGES.

it in a state of dis-repair. School-children peering through the windows into the cellars saw the grass growing on the floors.

The copper cupolas on the towers were removed by Mr. Howard, presumably on account of their weight. The old stone flags on the roof were replaced by slates, though the lead on the flat part was retained. Plate glass windows took the place of the original diamond-shaped panes, sham windows were inserted at the time of the window tax by way of economy. Much of the timber in the park was cut down and sold. The interior was decorated according to the fashion of the 19th century.

Mr. John Howard had two sons Aaron Clulow and Robert, and several daughters, but only one of them lived to grow up.

The elder son came into the Brereton property, the younger was given an estate, Malpas, which his father bought for him, and the daughter married Mr. McLean of Aston Manor, Shifnal, Shropshire.

Mr. Aaron Clulow Howard, owner of Brereton Hall, was taken ill with rheumatic fever and died at Southport on January 9th, 1861.

His eldest boy John Aaron was only 10 years old, and 3 younger boys all died under the age of thirty, unmarried.

The widow of Mr. A. C. Howard lived at the Hall till 1889 when she went to Blackpool, on account of her health.

Her son lived in the south of England, and for two years Brereton Hall was left vacant. In 1891, however, Mr. and Mrs. Moir, friends of Mrs. Howard, took the Hall on a long lease, and lived there till 1922. Mrs. Moir from her childhood had known Mrs. Howard, and in her girlhood as Esther Ann Mallabar Yates frequently used to come from her home, Overton House, Congleton, to Brereton Hall.

The invalid Mrs. Howard died in Blackpool in December, 1897, and in the next year her son Mr. John Aaron Howard died, leaving a little boy John Brereton Howard, only three years old, and the Brereton estate was placed in the hands of trustees.

CHANGES.

During the owner's minority, in 1911, an outbreak of dry-rot and damp was discovered in the Hall. The fabric was found to be in a serious condition, which necessitated extensive repairs. The whole of the exterior had to be re-pointed, and damp-courses put under the foundations, at a total cost of over £3,000, the work taking about six months.

When the first Great War broke out in 1914, John Brereton Howard took a commission with the 4th Royal Welsh Fusiliers. He was wounded in 1915, and on 6th April, 1918, he was wounded again fatally and died the same day. He made a will in France during the war. In it he left "all his estates in Cheshire, i.e., the Brereton Hall property, to his younger second cousin, Mr. Norman McLean for life, should he die childless they were to go to his second cousin Miss Garnett Botfield." Miss Botfield later married Captain Corbett Winder.

Mr. and Mrs. Moir with their family resided at the Hall for over thirty years from 1891 to 1922. In 1922 Mr. and Mrs. Norman Howard McLean came to live there, and in October, 1937, on the death of Mr. McLean Mrs. Corbett Winder became the owner of historic Brereton Hall.

In 1939 the second World War broke out and many of the great houses in the land could no longer be retained as private houses.

Brereton Hall then entered on a new phase. A party of school children was brought from the bombed centre of Manchester by the Head Mistress, Mrs. M. E. Massey, and under her able administration a well organised school came into being. With its increasing popularity the accommodation proved to be insufficient, and at the end of the war the Principal enterprisingly added a fine range of modern school buildings appropriately equipped.

Brereton's lords and ladies, knights and baronets have passed beyond the veil, their revelries and gaities, feuds and jealousies have ceased for ever, but here is a unique setting for scholars to hear the story and traditions of the past, to learn to live nobly, and to value the motto of the Lords of Brereton, *Opitulante Deo*, God being our helper.

CHAPTER 5.

DESCRIPTION OF BRERETON HALL. THE EXTERIOR.

The Hall is typically Elizabethan, built at one of the best periods of English architecture. Webb describes it as "the stately house of Brereton." Camden (1550-1620) in speaking of Brereton says that Sir William Brereton "added much credit and honour to the place by a magnificent and sumptuous house that he had there built."

The Hall has been well described in an article in "Country Life" in September, 1909, as follows:—

"The Hall is built in the shape of an E, the western front forming the long unbroken line. There are wings with gables at the north and south ends, and in the centre, over the main entrance, stand two octagonal towers. These towers, rising storey above storey, resemble the many-storeyed gate-towers found in the east of England.

The towers would be built for defence, but are also admirably adapted for ornament. Carved in stone, above the entrance-arch, in the central panel, are the royal arms, with lion and dragon supporters; on dexter panel the Tudor rose; on sinister, the Beaufort portcullis. Immediately below, in modest proportion, are the Brereton arms and the date, 1585. The threefold panel with royal arms is repeated above the first-floor window.

The rest of the building is comparatively plain, to act as a foil to the carved stonework, but there are typical designs in stone to break the monotony of the brick front. Originally the towers were surmounted with copper cupolas, in place of the present battlemented turrets.

The building is of brick, decorated with stone facings; ashlar stone being used for mullions, and coigns and ornamentation. This is in contrast to the work of Sir William Brereton's cousin, who thirty years previously had built old Moreton Hall, 6 miles from Brereton;

DESCRIPTION OF BRERETON HALL.

for old Moreton was a half-timbered house, a study in black-and-white, with a courtyard in the centre and protected with a moat."

The whole setting of Brereton Hall is lovely. By its side, there stands within the grounds a Church, of great charm and antiquity, with its tower half hidden in the trees.

A park, rich in oak and alder trees, stretched away to the north, but most of the valuable timber was cut down in the nineteenth century.

In front of the Hall flows a river, artificially broadened for effect, till it reaches a waterfall, then meanders through woods, widens out into a mere, and eventually flows into the River Weaver and before losing itself in the sea, passes by the ruins of Rock Savage, the old home of the father-in-law of the first Lord Brereton, and the model of Brereton Hall.

The Brereton gardens possess a variety of beauties—a lawn guarded by trees, with a park beyond, a walled-in fruit garden, a stream for water-cress, which emerges from one rockery and journeys between stone flags to another where it dives underground.

There are ponds and an orchard, a winter-garden ever-green through leafless months, and winding paths running throughout it all. (Enchanting grounds are these for "Hide-and-seeK," as the writer recollects from childhood memories).

Numerous out-buildings, offices and stables have been added in more recent times.

THE INTERIOR.

The interior has been re-modelled and has lost many of its original features, which have been replaced with work of the nineteenth century. There are, however, several rooms of architectural merit or heraldic interest, to be described.

LORD BRERETON'S BED-ROOM AND
DRESSING-ROOM.

This bed-room is a square-shaped panelled room over the north entrance. The panelling is still retained. The principal point of interest is the mantel-piece, with the Brereton arms, and a sevenfold shield, recording connections of the Breretons with Egerton and Belward, Corbet and Orreby.

In the inner room, or dressing-room, is a more elaborate mantel-piece, already described, celebrating the marriage of the second Lord Brereton with a daughter of George Goring, later the Earl of Norwich. The 12 minor shields are reproduced from the 12 shields in the monument placed in the Church in 1618. The heraldry is questionable, the arms of Scot, Kevelioc and Lupus, Earls of Chester, being introduced. The whole design of the mantel-piece is delightful; on either side of the fireplace are figures representing the husband and his wife.

The meaning of the 12 shields seems to be as follows:—

- No. 1. Two bars: Brereton.
- No. 2. Double tressure glory on an inescutcheon:
Lady Ada Huntingdon.
- No. 3. Or, Three piles gules: Scot, Earl of
Chester.
- No. 4. Kevelioc and Lupus: Earls of Chester,
quarterly.
- No. 5. Gules, Three pheons (arrow-heads);
argent: Belward.
- No. 6. Azure, three garbs (sheaves of wheat); or,
Kevelioc.
- No. 7. Azure, a wolf's head erased; argent:
Lupus.
- No. 8. Argent, a cross patence azure: Malpas.

- No. 9. Argent, a lion rampant, gules, with an orle of pheons, sable: Egerton.
No. 10. Or, two ravens, proper: Corbet.
No. 11. Argent, five chevrons, gules; on a canton of the second, a lion passant: Or: Orreby.
No. 12. Gules, two lions, passant: Orreby.

THE KITCHEN.

The least altered room is now the kitchen, but very likely originally the "winter parlour."

Let into the walls are panels, and their elaborately carved cartouches enframe moral inscriptions, e.g., "Doe nothing this day whereof thou mayest repent tomorrow."

"Knowest him well whom thou makest thy council lest he bewray thy secret."

A larger inscription:—

"Though thou be for thy
pedegre accompted as aincient
as Saturn, in wisdom as wise as
Solomon, in power as mightie as
Alexander, in wealth as riche
as Croessus, or for thy beauty
as Flora, yet if thou be careless
of religion and neglect the
true sarvice of the ever living
God thou arte a caytiffe
most vile and miserable."

The table is unique, without doubt original to the house. It has a central rail of great weight and solidity, and with cross-pieces about two feet from each end: the top consists of a large number of slips with herring-boned ends, in the manner of marquetric; said to be 365 in number, i.e., the days of the year. The table is 16 feet long and one of a pair.

THE LARGE DINING-ROOM.

The finest room in the Hall is the large Dining-Room, of spacious dimensions and rich in armorial bearings. It is left to the imagination to picture the animated scenes enacted here in the past, the feasting and gaiety, the wit and wisdom of Tudor, Stuart and Hanoverian times. The room is resplendent with the glories of the past.

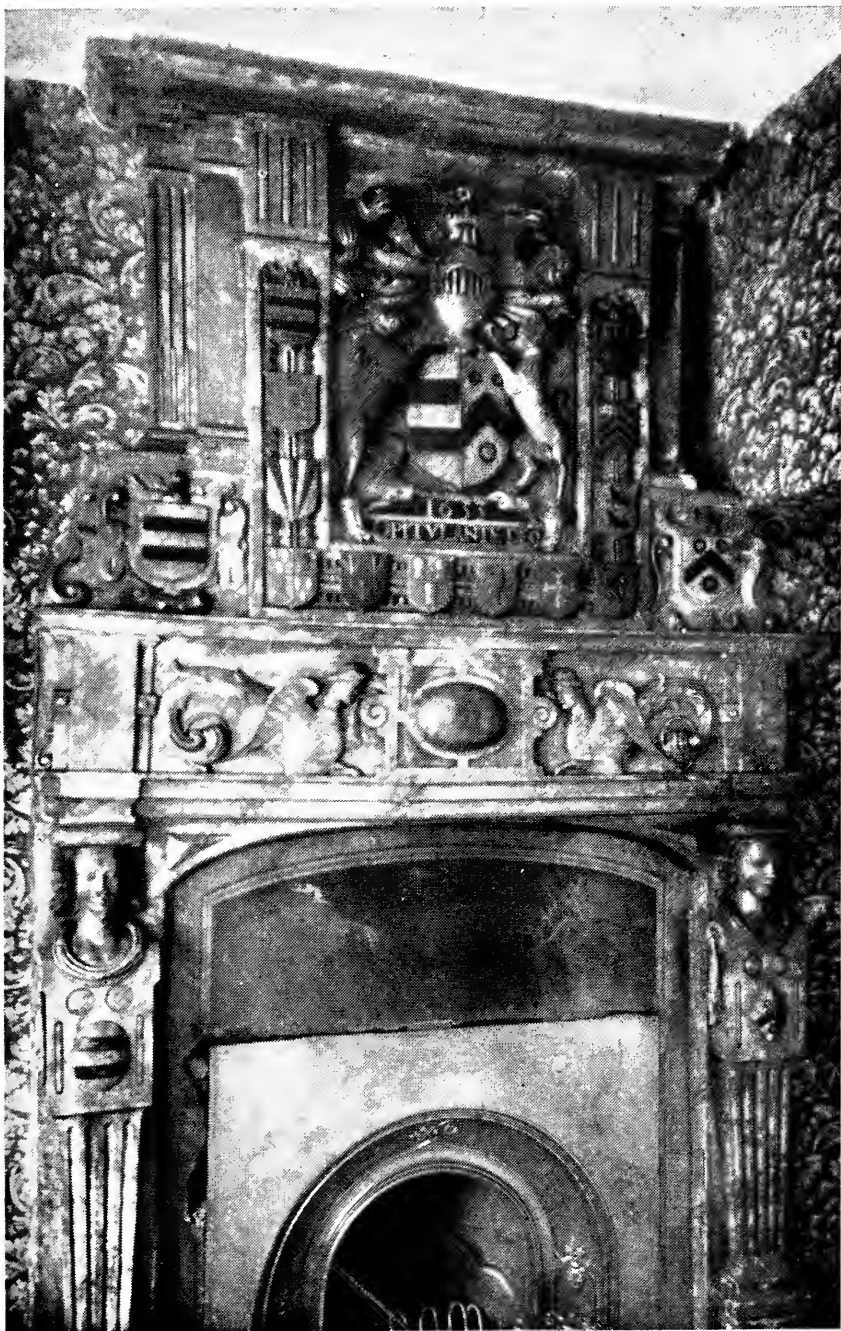
There is a remarkable cornice all round the room, with "crowns and shields representing the arms of 43 different states and principalities of Europe; to each is attached a scroll with the name of its King or Emperor in Latin. In the windings of every one of these scrolls is a red and a white rose. The shield of the King of Jerusalem bears an ornamented cross and His crown is a crown of thorns.

The mantel-piece is in honour of Queen Elizabeth. Her initials (E.R.) with royal arms, and date, 1585, occupy the central panel."

From the frieze above projects a globe of the heavens. It was not so very long since Copernicus had made the discovery of the solar system, that the earth was only one among a number of planets revolving round the sun, and that the stars were not mere ornaments in a vaulted dome. This globe of the heavens might suggest profound speculation in Tudor times.

Below the mantel-piece are two friezes, one with a wolf's head issuing from a ducal coronet, a badge suggestive of Hugh Lupus, Earl of Chester, the other with a lion-mask. The lion-mask was a favourite device with Sir William Brereton, perhaps in remembrance of his Egerton ancestors, who bore a lion rampant on their coat-of-arms.

The famous stained glass window depicting two Earls of Mercia and seven Earls of Chester, would be in this room till it was removed to Aston Hall.



By courtesy of "Country Life"

A mantel-piece of the time of Charles I.



By courtesy of "Country Life"

In the Dining Room

There is still some stained glass remaining with shields of famous families, and also the Brereton muzzled bear.

THE MINSTRELS GALLERY.

An old gallery on the first floor, with two short stair-cases, remains unchanged. This forms three sides of a square and looks down on a rectangular hall below. The explanation of its purpose seems that it was a gallery where the minstrels played while dancing was going on below. This is quite a common feature in Elizabethan halls. A painted cornice records the arms of many distinguished families.

Overlooking the gallery is a window with heraldic devices of these five families:—

Leigh of Boothes.

Manfaring of Croerton.

Trowtebeke, 1577.

Corbet de Leigh.

Radeliffe, 1577.

The date of the glass is 1577, and so is prior to the Hall, which is 1585.

OTHER FEATURES OF INTEREST.

Much of the panelling has been disfigured by being painted. There are other mantel-pieces not mentioned so far, which are also of interest. One, in a bed-room, is in alabaster and stone, with the head of the muzzled bear; another bed-room has a mantel-piece with muzzled bear and greyhound supporters. Each of the panels at the side bears a coronet, from which is suspended a medal with flourished initials of William Brereton; the family motto is inscribed, "Opitulante Deo."

In the south wing on the ground floor is a room with oak panelling; a bay window in the recess looks across the winter garden of evergreen trees and shrubs. The chimney-piece is divided by pilasters into three panels, with the head of the muzzled bear in each and in the centre the Brereton sable bars below the bear.

CHAPTER 6.

THE LOST TREASURES OF BRERETON HALL

1. THE CUPOLAS.

The present battlemented towers are in a way imposing, but are unwieldy, out of proportion, and not in accordance with the original design.

An engraving reproduced in Ormerod shews them in their former state, the twin towers crowned with cupolas having look-out windows in them. These cupolas were of copper, and in the summer sunshine shone like burnished gold, so we are told, and could be seen from Middlewich, six miles away.

The cupolas were removed by Mr. John Howard, presumably on the advice of an architect, as the weight might prove dangerous to a structure already centuries old.

They are a great loss, and their absence spoils the proportions of the original front.

2. MISSING PORTRAITS.

The first and second Lord Brereton.

The following Brereton portraits are in Atherstone Hall, the home of Mr. J. E. C. Bracebridge:—

The first Lord William Brereton.

The second Lord and his wife who was a Goring.

One, presumably of Sir John, son of the first Lord, and his wife, and two others, ladies unknown, by Janssens.

The third Lord Brereton.

A portrait of William, the third Lord Brereton, was painted about 1650 when he was about nineteen. It has been attributed to Cornelius Jansen, or it may be the work of a local Dutch artist, for Sir William was educated at Breda. An old label on the back of the frame, written in ink, calls it "Francis, Lord Brereton," but in the list of pictures bequeathed by Mr. C. H. Bracebridge to Aston Hall in 1872, it is called "William

Brereton." It is stated that a portrait of Lord William Brereton was sold at Shotover, Oxford, in 1855, and that Mr. Charles Bracebridge had another copy.

This information is taken from the Aston Hall Art Gallery Catalogue. The picture is hung in that gallery.

Jane Brereton. 1363991

There was also bequeathed to the Aston Hall Gallery by Mr. C. H. Bracebridge, in 1872, a portrait described as "Female resembling Queen Elizabeth." It is most probably a portrait of Jane Brereton, second daughter of Sir John Brereton, and granddaughter of the first Lord Brereton. (Description taken from catalogue).

Lady Fitton.

Another picture which is no longer at Brereton is one mentioned by Ormerod. "There is a fine picture of a lady richly habited with an infant son and daughter. Arms, Fitton impaling Barrett, with Holcroft on a shield of pretence. It appears to represent Lady Fitton, with her eldest son, the last Sir Edward Fitton, slain at Bristol, and her eldest daughter, wife of the Earl of Macclesfield."

The connection of the Fittons with the Breretons is that Sir John Brereton, son of the first Lord, married Anne, daughter of Sir Edward Fitton, of Gawsorth.

Supposed Painting of Queen Elizabeth.

Ormerod also says "There is a curious painting of Elizabeth with full sleeves, a rich tiara, and chains of jewels, hanging down from her neck to her waist; her hair extremely red; on one side the royal arms and over them E.R."

It has been suggested that there may be some confusion between this and the portrait described as "Female resembling Queen Elizabeth" said to be Jane Brereton. There is no trace of any painting of Queen Elizabeth at Brereton.

Elizabethan Pedigree and Silver Seal.

There is at Atherstone Hall an Elizabethan pedigree of the Brereton family by William Flower, with the arms in colours and the patent of the Barony granted to the first Lord Brereton.

There is also a silver seal that originally belonged to the first Lord Brereton.

Queen Elizabeth's Fan.

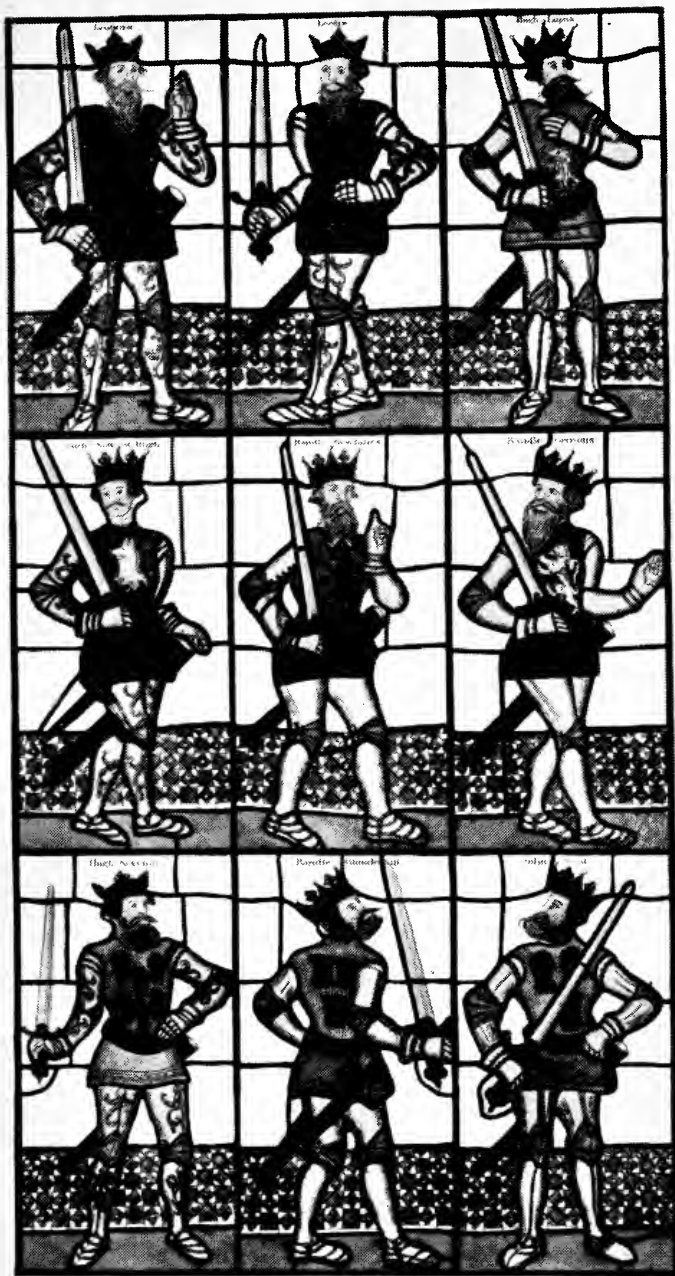
Tradition states that Queen Elizabeth paid a visit to Sir William Brereton, the founder of the Hall, and on her departure presented her fan to her host, as a memento of her visit.

In order to preserve it, it is said that Sir William built it into the wall of the room in which the Queen had slept.

This tradition will be discussed later on, but it is true that in the traditional bedroom used by the Queen there used to be some carving and inlaid work in the form of a fan; possibly a facsimile of the fan, or it may have been the Brereton arms, wrought in inlaid wood of different colours upon their ermine mantle, which would look like a fan, the whole being bordered with carving. In the sculptured stone over the entrance there is something of the sort which distinctly resembles a fan in shape.

Ormerod, in 1817, speaks of the "Brereton arms, surrounded with a triangular mantle, the form of which is traditionally reported to be copied from the fan of Queen Elizabeth."

An anonymous authority, about 1830, says that the original panel is still in the house, though much dilapidated; but the heraldic achievements have been reproduced by the hands of the painter.



The window with the Nine Earls

Leofwine
 Richd. Son of Hugh
 Hugh Kevelioc

Leofric
 Randle Meschines
 Randle Blundevill

Hugh Lupus
 Randle Gernons
 John Scot

He also says that "the sculptured chimney-piece, with the panelling, had been removed from Queen Elizabeth's room to a good apartment opening into the corridor, on the left on the ground floor."

This is a room at the north end known as the small dining-room.

About 1850 it happened that a maid, with the intention of saving coal, took smouldering coals one evening from the fire and placed them in the coal-box. This led to disastrous results. Next morning the room was discovered to be full of smoke; it was on fire!

Nor was the fire put out till considerable damage had been done. Mrs. Howard, the owner's wife, who was laid up at the time in a wing at the south end, was kept in ignorance of what was going on, the explanation given to her, for the servants' remissness in attending to her, being that the servants had overslept that morning! Meanwhile the fire blazed away.

When it was put out it was found that the flooring had been destroyed (and was replaced later by a deal floor), but most tragic of all it seems that the famous chimney-piece had gone too, and with it the mysterious "Fan of Queen Elizabeth."

The Nine Earls in Stained Glass.

Considerable interest centres in a certain stained glass window which stood in the Hall in the time of Sir William, the founder. The glass depicts Leofric and Leofwine, two Earls of Mercia, and the seven following Earls of Chester:—Hugh Lupus; Richard, son of Hugh; Randle Meschines; Hugh Kevelioc; Randle Gernous; and John Scot.

The honourable Agnes Leigh of Stoneleigh Abbey, in a letter to the author says "There is an erroneous idea that this glass is of great antiquity and identical

with the representations of the Earls which formerly graced the windows of Chester Abbey. But drawings of that glass, reproduced by Ormerod from some in the Harleian MSS shew considerable difference in the two styles. The author thinks that the glass now at Stoneleigh that came from Brereton was probably made for the decoration of that Hall towards the end of the sixteenth century, but that the figures may have been copied from paintings—stained glass or monkish illustrations of the period. Each figure is represented as standing out in a kind of arch or niche and he thinks that the style of architecture represented coincides with the architecture of the period in which the Hall was built.

Heirs male to the Brereton family died out in 1722 when the Holte family succeeded.

Sixty years later the Holte family were equally without a male successor and the property fell to the daughter of the last owner who married a Mr. Bracebridge of Atherstone.

It was her son who out of friendship to my father left the glass to my father (Lord Leigh). He may also have had in mind that my mother was a daughter of Lord Westminster who was descended from a brother of Hugh Lupus, Earl of Chester. I do not know at what date the glass was removed from Aston to Atherstone." In addition to this letter Miss Leigh kindly gave the writer much information on the subject, and shewed him the glass with the Earls now in the corridor of Stoneleigh Abbey, Warwickshire. Further information in corroboration was also received from Mr. Bracebridge, of Atherstone Hall.

CHAPTER 7.

LEGENDS AND TRADITIONS.

In a country village where changes come slowly, local stories are handed down from one generation to another. Usually there is at least an element of truth in tradition, though often obscured by exaggeration or embellishment.

Extravagant tales about Brereton will be passed over, such as the story of the original existence of eight towers, of which all but the present two were destroyed in a devastating fire; or the alleged courtyard entered through an archway beneath those towers; nor can we accept the legend of a siege for three months during the Civil War when the enemy's cannon fired on the Hall from the Lodges.

Fascinating are the more authentic traditions of the place, particularly those with a definite historic or literary basis, of which the following are recorded:—

The visit of Queen Elizabeth: The Murderer of an Archbishop: The Canopied Tomb: The muzzled bear: The floating log: The missing link: The Lover of a Queen.

The Visit of Queen Elizabeth.

A persistent tradition states that Queen Elizabeth laid the foundation stone of Brereton Hall, and that in later years she paid a visit to the Sir William who built the Hall and afterwards became the first Lord Brereton.

Even the cautious Ormerod mentions the tradition, and perhaps others borrowed it from him and passed it on.

The story continues, in support of the tradition, that on her departure as a memento of her visit, the Queen presented the owner of the Hall with her Fan, of great beauty and value.

Over the main entrance is the room in which it is said the Queen slept, though no traces are left giving a hint of a royal occupant.

It has been argued that the fact of the house being built in the shape of an E, and the prominence of the Royal Arms with initials E.R. outside and inside, support the story of the Queen laying the foundation stone.

The tragic association of the Brereton family with the Queen's family might be urged as well. The Queen's mother, Anne Boleyn, and a Sir William Brereton (though not of Brereton) had been put to death on charges of guilt together, brought by Henry VIII.

Even though this Sir William were not of the Brereton branch of the family, for reasons of sentiment the Queen might visit the home of the Breretons, remembering that a Brereton and her own mother had perished together as innocent victims.

Attractive as the tradition is there can be found no documentary evidence for Queen Elizabeth visiting Brereton, or in fact for ever having paid a single visit to Cheshire. It is possible to trace her visits to Coventry, Kenilworth and Stamford in 1567, and in 1575 she passed through Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire, staying for 19 days with the Earl of Leicester. She returned through Staffordshire, the nearest county to Cheshire, and through Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire.

It seems that from 1582—1588 Queen Elizabeth remained quietly at Westminster, owing to a supposed attack of small-pox during that period, and the suggestion has been made that her malady left scars on her face which made her unwilling to undergo the publicity of further Royal Progresses. The date carved on Brereton Hall is 1585.

Reluctantly the historian has to reject the idea of a royal visit, secretly hoping that some day unexpected evidence will be forthcoming to prove that he is wrong.

On being asked his opinion, Professor Neale, Astor Professor of English History in the University of London, and a leading authority on Queen Elizabeth, gave this reply:

“Alas, the local tradition about Queen Elizabeth staying at Brereton Hall is, like most of such traditions, purely fiction; she was never as far north as Cheshire.

The most complete itinerary of Queen Elizabeth on her progresses, etc., is to be found in Sir E. K. Chambers's “Elizabethan Stage,” Vol. 4, Appendix A, page 75 et seq.”

The Murderer of an Archbishop.

Let us recall an episode in history. King Henry II became an intimate friend of Thomas à Becket, Chancellor, and—though only in deacon's orders—also Archdeacon of Canterbury. The two became inseparable in sport and feast. Becket loved pageantry, excelled in sport, and was astute in managing the finances of the kingdom. So delighted was the King with his friend that when the vacancy occurred it did not seem incongruous to make him Archbishop of Canterbury. This the King did in 1162, in spite of Becket's protests.

From that moment Becket changed. Pageantry and frivolity were put aside, he wore a hair shirt next to his skin, and exulted in penance and being scourged. He washed the feet of 13 beggars every night, and lived the life of a saint. His relations with the King were changed. A quarrel arose over “clerical privileges.”

At Christmastide in 1170 King Henry was in Normandy, with his Court, and in fury he denounced Becket:—“What sluggards and cravens I have nurtured and bred in my realm. They keep no faith to their lord, when they allow him to be mocked so foully by a low-born clerk.”

Four knights heard the words, one of them a Brereton. At once they went to Canterbury, to the Cathedral, and there on the steps of the north transept they slew Thomas à Becket, as he declared himself "No traitor, but archbishop and priest of God."

The King was overcome with grief. For three days he kept to his room, neither eating nor drinking, and in 1174 did penance by making a pilgrimage to Canterbury, where he submitted to a public scourging by the monks.

It is recorded that a window in Brereton Church depicted the martyr and his murderers, and beneath was written:—

"Ricardus Breto, Necnon Martelis Hugo. Willms Traci. Reginald Fitzurci Martorum Thoma, fieri fecere, beatum anno nullens contens, septuagenon." The full names of the murderers are—Sir Richard Brereton, Sir Hugh de Morville, Sir William de Tracy, and Sir Reginald Fitzurse.

This rather confusing Latin inscription means that these four men murdered the blessed Thomas à Becket in 1170.

Sir Richard Brereton would be a relative or contemporary of Sir William Brereton with whom the Brereton pedigree starts.

The erection of this window required the sanction of Parliament and the Royal Assent.

Owen Salusbury Brereton wrote a description of the window, published under "Philosophical Transactions, 1781.

R. M. Brereton refers to a further inscription on this window which was "Lest this monument in glasse being on ye upper window of the north syde of the Chauncell of Brereton church should be broken, I, S. Willm. Brereton, Knight, to the end hyt may

remayne in memorie to ye posteritie have caused the same to be here pictured the 25th of March, 1608, W. Brert."

No vestige remains of this window, or of this later inscription. There seems no sense in saying, as R. M. Brereton does, that this inscription of 1608 was ever added to the Becket window, a more reasonable conjecture would be that the inscription was put in Astbury Church by Sir William Brereton, referring to frescoes on the north wall of the Astbury Church over the arches. These are almost, if not quite, obliterated, but might, in one of the scenes, have been a representation of Becket and his murderers, painted on the wall in case the window at Brereton were to be broken, which was actually the case, and so the gruesome incident might be preserved in pictorial form.

The Canopied Tomb.

In the Churchyard of Astbury is an ancient tomb with a canopy over it. Ormerod writes as follows:—"Near the north-east angle of the churchyard are four recumbent figures carved in red stone. The figure to the north is that of an ecclesiastic resting on a slab, which forms the lid of a stone coffin, wholly above ground: that on the south is the figure of an armed knight placed on an altar-tomb, the feet resting on an animal, the helmet conical, and the shield emblazoned two barrs, in chief three leopards' heads, of which the centre and sinister head alone are remaining. The two middle figures, an armed knight and his lady rest on a tomb higher than the last, over which is a raised pointed arch, with a pediment and pinnacles ornamented with crockets. The following inscription has been cut in capitals within the arch at the west end:—

HIC JACENT RADULPHUS BR
ERETON MILES ET DOMINA
ADA UXOR SUA, UNA FI
LIARUM DAVIDIS COMI
TIS HUNTINGDONIS."

Translation:—Here lie Radulph (or Ralph) Brereton, Knight, and Lady Ada his wife, one of the daughters of the Earl of Huntingdon.

Lady Ada, the alleged wife of Sir Radulphus Brereton, was the third married daughter of David, Earl of Huntingdon. This David was the third son of Henry, Prince of Scotland, who was the only son of King David I of Scotland.

Lady Ada was the grand-daughter of Hugh de Kevelioc, Earl Royal of Chester. Her brother was John the Scot, 7th and last Earl Royal of Chester. Hugh Lupus, Earl of Chester, was an ancestor of Lady Ada's mother. Her descent may be traced back to Egbert, the first Saxon King of all England, and Kenneth the first Celtic King of Scotland.

But there are doubts about this marriage of a Brereton with this Lady of royal descent and kindred.

In the first place, the authenticity of the inscription in the archway of the canopied tomb, has been questioned.

Secondly, the genealogical trees express uncertainty. To the name of Sir Ralph Brereton, Ormerod adds the dubious note "said in some pedigrees to marry Ada, daughter of David, Earl of Huntingdon, relict of Henry Hastings."

Thirdly, there is the age of the lady in question to be considered. The date of the death of her father is given as 1219, her first husband Lord Hastings did not die till 1268, so Lady Ada must have been in her fifties before marrying Sir Ralph Brereton, and bringing him a son.

Fourthly, in Erdeswick's Survey of Staffordshire, published about 1603, an alternative husband is found for her second choice!

LEGENDS AND TRADITIONS.

“Sir William Handsacre had to wife Ada the widow of Henry, Lord Hastings and daughter and heir of David, Earl of Huntingdon.”

Thomas Cooper, a Solicitor in Congleton investigated the whole question in 1888, carefully weighing all the evidence, and the conclusion he comes to is “that the canopied tomb represents some members of the Brereton family about the time of Edward II, but who we do not know.”

The Brereton family, however, finds support for the marriage of Sir Ralph with Lady Ada, in the monument in Brereton Church, erected in 1618, referring to Breretons being buried in Astbury Churchyard, and the monument is decorated with shields bearing the arms of Lady Ada and Earls Hugh Lupus, Scot and Kevelioc.

These shields are repeated on a mantel-piece in the Hall, dated 1633.

The Earls of Chester were depicted in stained glass in a window in Brereton Hall, and this would have special significance if they found their place there because of their connection with Lady Ada, an ancestress of the Breretons.

The mystery which surrounds Ada, alleged wife of Sir Randolph (Ralph) Brereton, has puzzled the College of Arms and others since Elizabethan days, but the researches of Miss Estelle J. Brereton of Washington, U.S.A., just prior to the war, go far to clear up the matter. She has come to the conclusion that there were two Adas: one, daughter of David Earl of Huntingdon, marrying Henry de Hastings, and the other (her daughter), wife of Brereton. It is no wonder that the Heralds' pedigrees, making the widow of Hastings marry Brereton, and have issue by both husbands, have been much criticised, for at Hastings' death, his widow would have been in her late 50's or 60's. There are fairly good grounds for believing that she did not survive him at all. Miss Brereton has discovered that this Ada had three daughters by Hastings—Ada, Margery and Hillaria. G. Andrews Moriarty of Wells Beach, Maine,

U.S.A., the foremost authority for the early Hastings pedigree says that there are strong reasons for believing that a Hastings of the period married Sir William Handsacre of Staffs. Miss Brereton believes that Ada (the daughter) married first Sir W. Handsacre and secondly Brereton.

The figures of that ancient knight and his lady lie sheltered under the canopy of their tomb at Astbury, silent throughout the centuries—provokingly silent.

The Muzzled Bear.

The story is told that his valet had the audacity to interrupt a Sir William Brereton at his dinner. Seeing his master's anger, the valet fled upstairs, but Sir William pursued him there, and in his ungovernable rage murdered him. It is even stated in which room the murder took place.

Sir William, in fear and consternation of the deed and its probable consequences, went to London to plead for pardon with the King. The royal authority was great in those days.

Sir William went on his knees before the King and confessed his crime. The King was obdurate and refused to pardon him immediately, but offered to give him a chance. He said he would allow Sir William three days in which to invent a muzzle to muzzle a bear; if it proved efficacious, his life would be spared, if not—well, the bear would provide his punishment!

For three days Sir William was shut up in the Tower. At the end of that time he was brought before a bear. The bear was let loose. The prisoner flung his newly-invented muzzle over its head and escaped unharmed.

From that time the muzzled bear became the emblem of the Breretons.

The bear, of course, was a familiar object in olden days. Bear-baiting was a most popular form of sport. The bear wore a great leather muzzle to prevent it from

biting the dog, and also to prevent it from being bitten by the dog.

Congleton, about five miles from Brereton, became notorious for a certain bear transaction, perpetuated in rhyme:—

“Congleton rare, Congleton rare,
Sold the Church Bible to buy a new bear.”

In the 17th century a sum of money was raised to buy a new Bible for the Church at Congleton, but the town bear having died, a new bear was bought instead!

The 17th century black-and-white inn at Brereton is named “The Bear’s Head,” and has as its sign a muzzled bear.

The story of the origin of the muzzled bear of the Breretons sounds ridiculous, but whatever can the real origin be?

R. M. Brereton gives the Brereton coat of arms thus:—

Arms, Argent, two bars sable.

Crest, a bear’s head proper issuing from a ducal coronet. A bear’s head coupé, muzzled.

Supporters, Dexter, a bear proper; Sinister, Argent, a wolf collared.

Azure, armed gule.

The ducal coronet would indicate royal descent.

The motto is “*Opitulante Deo*” (“By the help of God”).

The Brereton Death Omen.

“When any heir in the Worshipful Family of the Breertons in Cheshire is near his Death there are seen in the Pool adjoining Bodies of Trees swimming for certain days together.” So states an old book in 1693.

William Camden in his *Britannia* mentions this. “I have heard,” he says, “an extraordinary circumstance attested by many persons of credit and generally believed, that before the death of any heir of this family (Brereton) trunks of trees are seen to swim on the surface of the adjoining lake.”

Here is a quotation on the same subject from Drayton’s *Polyolbion*, 1612:—

“That black ominous mere
accounted one of those that England’s wonders
make;
of neighbours Blackmere named; of strangers,
Brereton’s lake;
whose property seems farre from reason’s way to
stand;
for, neere before his death that’s owner of the land,
she sends up stocks of trees, that on the top doe
float,
by which the world her first did for a wonder note.”

A group of trees and a marsh are all that remain of the famous Bagmere, but the tradition is still remembered; and the River Croco which flows past the Hall still has its origin in Bagmere.

Whether the omen can be proved true or not is unknown, but Sir Philip Sydney wrote in his “Seven Wonders of England” :—

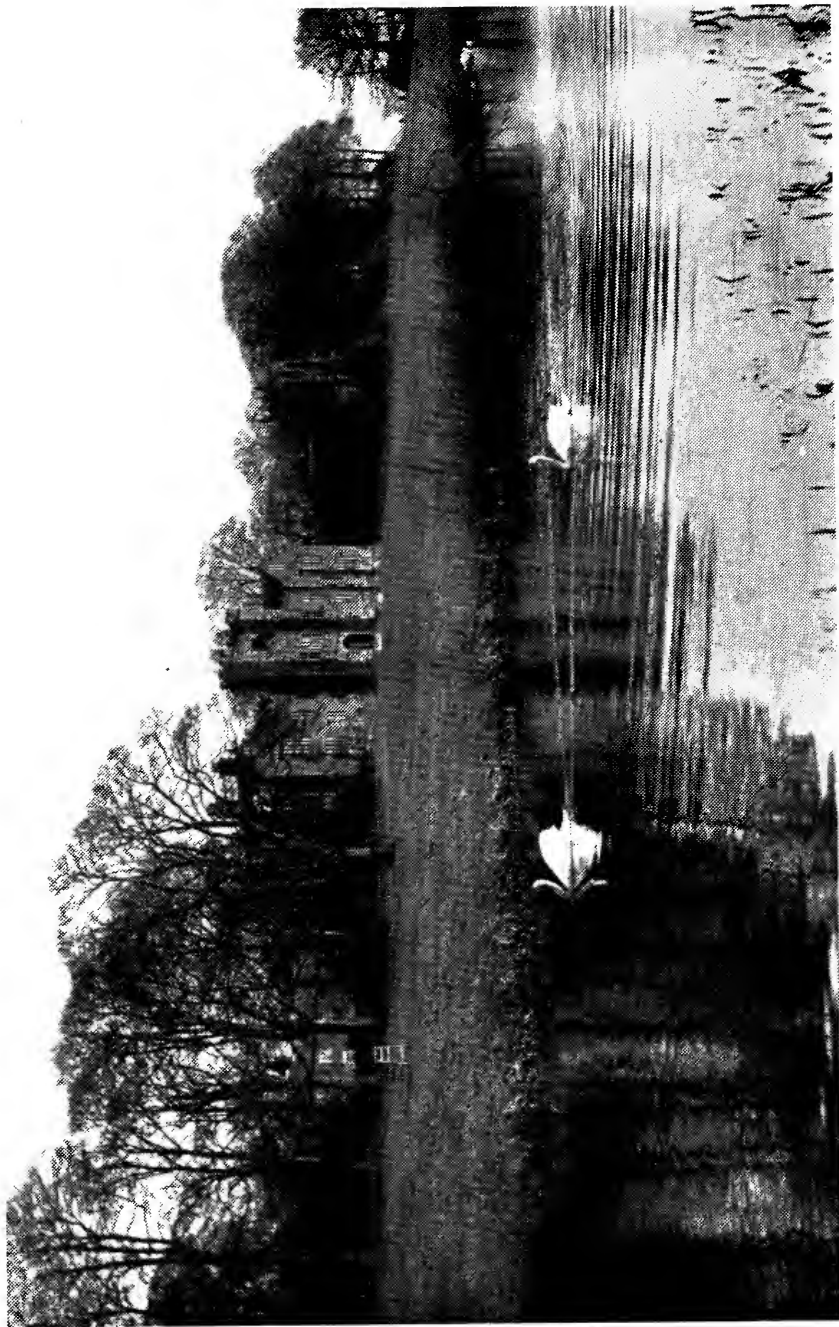
“The Breretons have a lake, which, when the sun approaching warms (not else), dead logs up-sends from hideous depth, which tribute when it ends sure sign it is the Lord’s last thread is spun.”

The Missing Link.

It has been frequently said that there is a mysterious missing link to the Brereton title and right to the property, and that an unknown owner might bring forward his claims.

The matter is discussed in “The Brereton Family of Cheshire” by R. M. Brereton, and gives the results of the investigations made by Rev. E. W. Brereton.

It is pointed out that “it is strange that the title should have lapsed with the death of Francis, 5th Lord Brereton, in 1722. Henry the second son of William, 2nd Lord, died young, without issue. George, the third son of William, 2nd Lord, died unmarried. Thomas, the fourth son of William, 2nd Lord, died in 1709, leaving one son, Thomas. It is clear that on the death of Francis, 5th Lord Brereton, in 1722, the title should have descended to his cousin Thomas, only son of his



Brereton Hall in the Twentieth Century

Photo by the Author

uncle Thomas, 4th son of 2nd Lord Brereton, and, therefore, heir.

But, on the death of Lord Francis, it is said that Lady Elizabeth Brereton, the last surviving daughter of the second Lord Brereton, occupied Brereton Hall and held it against her fifth brother, John Brereton, Rector of Beverley.

The Rev. John Brereton, whose omission by Ormerod from the family pedigree is said to have been due to the Holte influence, was brought up as a son of Captain John Brereton, of Nantwich, his uncle, and is said to have agreed to that parentage on condition of being presented to the Living of Beverley, as there seemed but a remote chance at that time of his succession.

When, therefore, he advanced his claims, he is said to have been confronted by Lady Elizabeth with the affidavit which he himself had made as to his parentage.

He was a decided Puritan, and hence an object of abhorrence to Lady Elizabeth, who, like her mother, favoured the Roman Catholic religion and who is also said to have left all her property to the Holtes, who were all known Roman Catholics, and to have destroyed all the documents at Brereton which could possibly lead to a Brereton succession.

As the Rev. John Brereton failed to establish his claim, and Thomas Brereton, for some reason as yet unexplained, did not seem aware of his right of succession, or at least made no claim, the peerage was allowed to fall into abeyance, and the Brereton Hall estates passed to the Holtes of Aston Hall, in right of Jane Brereton, wife of Sir Robert Holte.

It is said that William, 3rd Lord Brereton, left by will the Brereton estates to the descendants of his aunt Jane, if his two sons, John and Francis, died issueless. This will has not been found, but the provision seems strange and even illegal, thus to exclude both his brother Thomas and also his nephew, Thomas Brereton of Helmingham, if it were entailed property."

Such is the incredible-sounding tale of legitimate heirs failing to claim the historic title of Lord Brereton and enter into their lawful ancestral estate of Brereton Hall.

The Lover of a Queen.

One April day in the year 1536 a Tournament of knightly sports was in progress at the Tilting-Ground at Greenwich. King Henry VIII. was there and his Queen, Anne Boleyn.

The Queen accidentally dropped her handkerchief, and a chivalrous knight picked it up on the point of his lance and handed it back to the Queen.

King Henry saw this act; he left the royal stand, where he and Anne Boleyn were sitting, and his furious temper was plain to see. He ordered that the knight, Sir William Brereton, and four companions of his should be arrested immediately, and carried off to the Tower of London, to be charged with High Treason as lovers of the Queen. Anne Boleyn was arrested a few hours later, and never saw the King again.

King Henry was watching for a chance of deposing the Queen, and this was his opportunity.

A jury of Henry's choosing was impanelled, and the five prisoners were hastily tried, and though they pleaded "Not guilty," were sentenced to death and beheaded on Tower Hill on May 17th, 1536.

The names of the condemned men are—Lord Rochford, Anne Boleyn's own brother; Sir William Brereton; Sir Henry Norris; Sir Francis Weston and Mark Smeaton, a mere boy, who pleaded guilty under torture.

The hapless Queen was beheaded two days after at a scaffold within the Tower. The booming of a gun at 9 a.m. was the signal that all was over, the Queen had been decapitated.

The next day the King was betrothed to Jane Seymour, and the marriage took place ten days later at York Place, privately.

There has been some confusion as to the identity of this Sir William Brereton. Apparently he was Sir William Brereton of Aldford, the 7th son of Sir Randle of Malpas Hall. He and two of his brothers were at court from an early age. He presented Anne Boleyn with an Italian greyhound named "Urian" after his brother. The details given about the tournament appear to be an embellishment of the deeds of Norris and not Brereton. Brereton was arrested on May 4th, the day after the Queen, and sent to Martin Tower, Tower of London, on the 12th. The Queen was beheaded two days before Rochford, Brereton, Norris and Smeaton. They were all executed on Tower Hill, but Mark Smeaton, the "player," was hanged. Their remains, says Wriothesley's Chronicle, were buried in the Tower precincts.

It is recorded in the state papers that Brereton accompanied Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn on a visit to Cardinal Wolsey shortly before the latter's death to check the inventory of the Cardinal's goods and chattels. Cavendish, Wolsey's secretary, was therefore prejudiced when he declared Brereton guilty of indiscretion with the Queen.

CHAPTER VIII.

BRERETON CHURCH.

Standing in the grounds, close to the Hall, is the Brereton Church. Its square stone tower rises out of the trees. The original Church dates back to the time of Richard I., but it is doubtful if any of this building remains. It is said that a Brereton setting out on a Crusade vowed that if he returned in safety that he would build a Church to the glory of God. He returned and built Brereton Church. There is no proof of this story, but it rings quite true.

This is not the place to go at length into the history of the Church, but certain interesting features should be noted.

Inside the Church, over the south door, is a list of Rectors, complete from 1297. The name Brereton frequently recurs.

Sir William Brereton, who became first Lord, set up a monument in the chancel, which has already been mentioned.

There are 12 heraldic shields and an inscription in Latin, of which may be translated like this:—

“In ancient times when this Church of Brereton was a donative chapel within the parish of Astbury, the ancestors of William Brereton, knight, Baron of Malpas (who erected this monument in 1618 A.D.), had been buried in the Churchyard of Astbury. Ancient monuments of some of them still remain there at this date, marked in English with the words ‘Knights burials.’ But after the said chapel was made a parochial Church, the ancestors of the said William Brereton, knight, patron of this Church of Brereton, have been buried in this chancel, except those who died abroad.”

The word “donativa” means a benefice presented by the founder or patron without reference to the bishop.

BRERETON CHURCH.

The actual wording of the inscription in Latin is—

“Antiquis temporibus quando haec ecclesia de Brereton fuit capella donativa intra parochiam de Asburie, antecessores Gulielmi Brereton militis, baronis de Malpas et hujus monumenti fundatoris anno Domini 1618 sepulti erant in coemeterio de Asburie, ubi antiqua quorundam eorum monumenta adhuc extant Anglice no'i'ta Knightes burialls, sed postquam dicta capella ecclesia parochialis facta fuit, antecessores dicti Gulielmi Brereton militis, hujus ecclesia de Brereton patroni, in hac cancella sepulti fuerunt, proeter eos qui in externis regnis et comitatibus moriebantur.”

Above this monument hangs the remains of a suit of armour, with helmet, gauntlets and spurs.

Another interesting monument is that of William Smethwicke and his wife, Frances Colclough, in the south aisle.

“Both figures have been painted, both have ruffs. The hands are clasped and a hood is thrown over the lady's head and a book placed on each side of her. Under the male figure on a tablet of black marble is inscribed ‘Here lieth interred the body of William Smethwicke, of Smethwicke, who mindful of his death, erected this monument for himself and his wife, pious to God, pious in good works,’ which William was born October 1st A.D.1551 and died June 6th, 1643.”

Sir Ranulphus de Brereton gave his daughter, who married Thurston de Smethwicke, the lands of Smethwicke, which formed a portion of the Brereton demesne, on her marriage.

There is a peal of five bells, with dates and inscriptions as follows:—

BRERETON CHURCH.

1. Treble. 1634. Jesus be our speed.
2. 1634. God save this Church.
3. 1634. Glory be to God.
4. 1727. Prosperity to this Parish.
(Re-cast 1905).
5. Tenor. 1738. Cast at the expense of Sir
Lister Holte, Bart.

The original carved oak roof had carved on it "Thomas Whittingham, erector, 1684." About 1900 the whole roof was found to be in a critical condition, owing to the ravages of the oak beetle. It had to be removed and replaced, the new one being a facsimile of the old.

THE BRERETON DESCENT.

(According to Ormerod).

William de Brereton (circa 1175).

William de Brereton.

Ralph de Brereton.

Sir William Brereton = Margery, daughter of Randle de Thornton
(living temp. Johan and Henry 3).

Sir Ralph Brereton = said in some pedigrees to marry Ada,
daughter of Earl of Huntingdon, and relict of Henry Hastings.

Sir William Brereton = daughter of Sir Richard de Sandbach.

Sir William Brereton = Roesia, daughter of Ralph de Vernon.

William de Brereton = Margery, daughter of Richard de Bosley
(died in his father's lifetime).

Sir William Brereton = Ellen, daughter of Philip Egerton.

Sir William Brereton = Amylla, daughter of Hugh Venables.

William Brereton = Alice, sister and heiress of Ric. Corbet of
Leighton (died before his father).

Sir William Brereton = Philippa, daughter of Sir John Hulse.

Sir Andrew Brereton = Agnes, daughter of Robert Legh.

Sir William Brereton = Alice, daughter of Sir John Savage.

William Brereton = Anne, daughter of Sir William Bouth (died
before his father).

Sir William Brereton = Jane, daughter of Sir Peter Warburton
(died 1559).

Sir William Brereton, 1st Lord = Margaret, daughter of Sir
John Savage (1550—1631).

GENEALOGICAL TABLE OF THE LORDS OF BRERETON.

Sir William Brereton (1st Lord Brereton) (1530—1631) = Margaret, daughter of Sir John Savage

1. 2. 3. Sir John = Anne, daughter of Sir Edward Fitton of Gawsworth

o.s.p. (died 1629)

