

sketch by W. Penny

sketch by Geo. Nicholson

VIEW OF SPEKE HALL

I.—*An Inquiry into the probability of a Tradition connected with the Library and Furniture of JAMES IV. of SCOTLAND, and of their having been carried off after the Battle of Flodden, and set up at SPEKE HALL, in the County of LANCASTER.*

BY WILLIAM ROBERT WHATTON, Esq. F. S. A., Member of the Royal College of Surgeons of London, and Member and Librarian of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Manchester, &c. &c.

In a Letter to the Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

[Read 28th January 1828.]

Manchester, December 15, 1827.

SIR,

IN consequence of some conversation with my friend Dr Hibbert, on the subject of the Antiquities of Speke Hall, in the county of Lancaster, it occurred to me that it might not prove altogether uninteresting to the Society of Antiquaries of Edinburgh, if I laid before them such information relative to the well-known tradition connected with the Library and Wainscot of James IV. of Scotland, said to have been carried off by Sir Edward Norris after the battle of Flodden, as the present obscure nature of the inquiry and the great lapse of time would allow.

The Doctor informs me that a Committee has been organized for investigating this curious tradition; and, with the view, therefore, of aiding their inquiries, I have diligently examined the writings of such authors as might have been expected to mention the occurrence, but have not been fortunate enough to succeed in meeting with any intelligence whatsoever relating to it prior to the very late period of 1767.

Under this date, Seacome, in his History of the House of Stanley, page 46, after eulogizing the virtues and military prowess of Sir Edward Stanley, afterwards Lord Monteagle, continues his observations in these words:—

“And here justice as well as respect to the ancient and worthy house of Norris of Speke calls upon me to acquaint the reader with the bravery of Sir Edward Norris, son of Sir William Norris, who was slain at the battle of Mussleburrow, in the reign of Henry VII.”¹

“This valiant and heroic gentleman, Sir Edward Norris, commanded a body of the army under General Stanley at Flodden-field, where he behaved with so much courage and good conduct, that he was honoured by the King his master with the like congratulatory letter² above mentioned, for his good service on that day; in token whereof, he brought *from the deceased King of Scots' Palace all or most of his princely Library, many books of which are now at Speke, particularly four large folios, said to contain the Records and Laws of Scotland at that time, and worthy the perusal of the learned and judicious reader.*”

“And he also brought from the said Palace the Wainscot of the King's Hall, and put it up in his own hall at Speke, wherein are seen all the orders of architecture, as Tuscan, Dorick, Ionick, Corinthian, and Composite; and round the top of it is this inscription, “Sleep not till thou hast well considered how thou hast spent the day past: if thou hast well done, thank God for't; if otherwise, repent you.”

In Enfield's History of Liverpool, 4to, 1774, page 115, is this passage, “In the manor of Speke is a hall where are several antiquities, particularly a curious piece of wainscot, brought by Sir Edward Norris from the library of the King of Scotland, after the battle of Flodden-field.”

Seacome and Enfield have been either literally copied or generally followed by Mr Gough in his edition of Camden, by Mr Gregson in his Frag-

¹ According to the visitation of Smith, Somerset Herald, which took place in 1567, 9th of Elizabeth, the Sir Edward Norris who may be supposed to have fought at Flodden in 1513 must be the fourth son of Sir William Norris and Katherine Bolde, and cannot, by any possibility, be the son of Sir William Norris who was slain at Mussleburrow; neither did the battle of Mussleburrow take place in the reign of Henry VII., but in 1547, 1st Edward VI.; moreover, this Knight died without issue.

² Letter of thanks from Henry VIII. to the several Commanders.

ments of the History of Lancashire, by Mr Baines in his Lancashire History and Gazetteer, and by every subsequent writer who has touched on the history and antiquities of that division of the county of Lancaster in which the manor of Speke is situated.

These extracts constitute the whole authority upon which this curious tradition rests; and I now propose, after giving a sufficiently minute description of the manor-hall of Speke, to adduce such reasons, supported by inference and proof, as, I flatter myself, will be considered adequate to the perfect annihilation of the tradition in question.

Soon after the Conquest, Speke was the property of Benedict de Garnet, whose daughter, Annora, carried it in marriage to Adam de Molyneux, an ancestor of the Sefton family.

With the family of Molyneux this estate continued for some time, until at length it was given to Joan, daughter of Sir John Molyneux of Sefton, knight, on her marriage with William Norris, son of Thomas Norris, Esq. of Sutton.

The elder branch of the Norris family, after a residence at Speke of several centuries, merged in that of his Grace the present Duke of St Albans, by whose relative, Mr Charles George Beauclerk, it was sold to Richard Watt, Esq. the present possessor.

Speke may be considered one of the most perfect specimens of the ancient manor-halls of the reign of Elizabeth now existing in the county of Lancaster. It is built of wood and plaster, the materials employed in the construction of most houses of that description, down to the middle of the seventeenth century.³ It was surrounded by a moat, the outline and remains of which are yet tolerably entire, and over which a bridge leads to the principal entrance. The front of the porch, at this time covered with ivy, bears the following inscription, carved on the lower edge of the window, in black and white letters of an antique shape: “*This worke . 25 . yards . long . was . wolly . built . by : Edw : N : Esq : Anno : 1598.*”

From the porch is a passage leading into an inner court of an oblong form, seventeen yards wide by about twenty-four deep. In the centre of this quadrangle grow two yew trees, which were doubtless in high esteem with

³ See the View of Speke Hall, Plate I.

the bowmen and archers of former days. The gallery windows on the chamber floor, the bay-window, and the bow-room window of the great hall, look into this court.

Passing down the principal lobby, you enter the great hall, where is seen the *Wainscot*⁴ which has given rise to the tradition under consideration. This very splendid and highly-finished specimen of the carved oaken wainscot, common to the counties of Lancaster and Chester, is erected against the north wall of the room, and is divided, perpendicularly from the ceiling, two-thirds of its extent downwards, into eight compartments; these compartments being again subdivided horizontally into five rows of pannels.

A space corresponding with the width of two of the compartments, on the right hand, with the exception of the uppermost pannels, is occupied by the door-case which projects into the room.

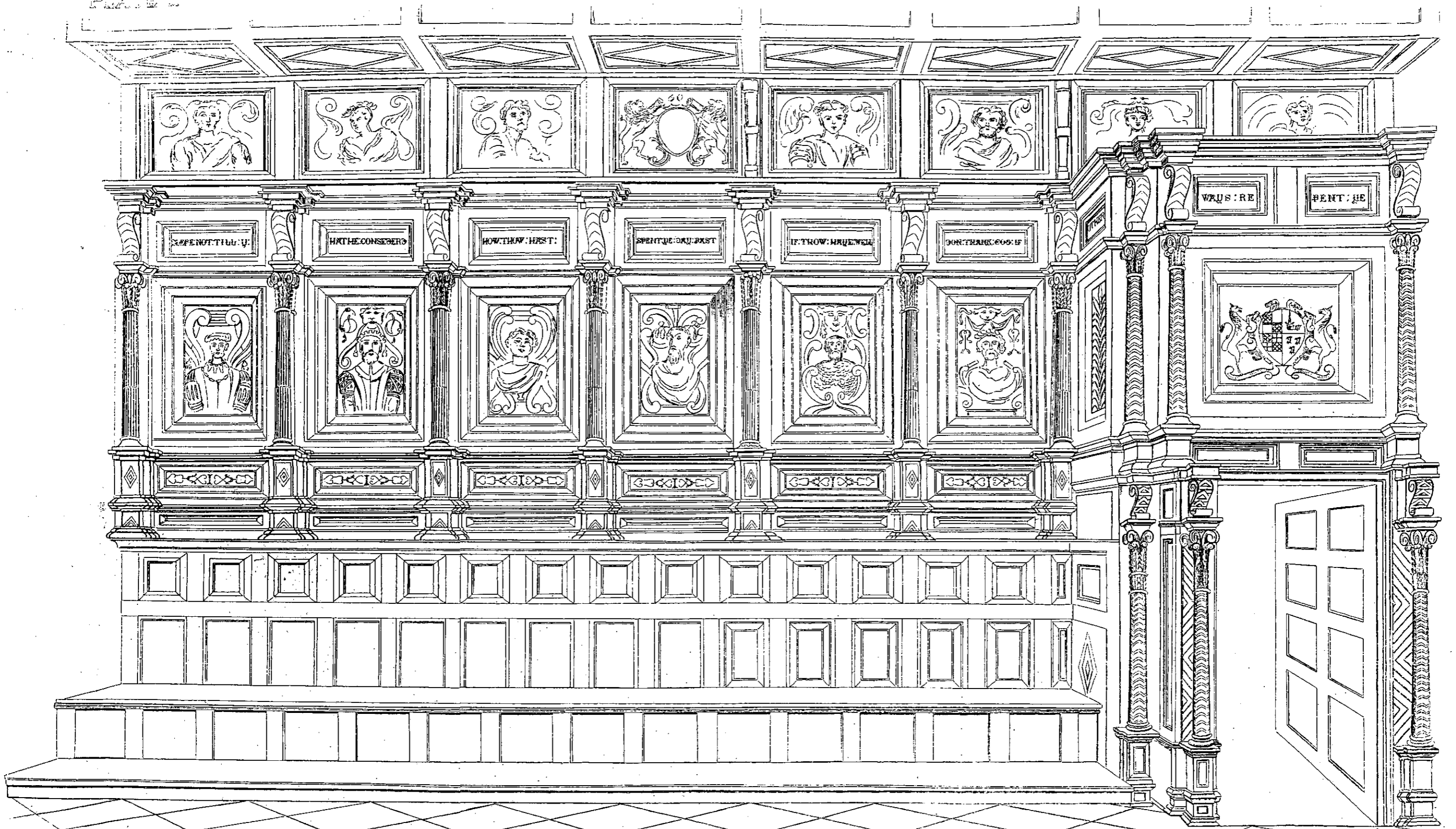
That part of the wainscot which is usually allotted, in our more modern decorations for similar purposes, to the frieze or cornice, is here formed into a projecting head, extending through the whole length of the work, in a line with the ceiling of the room, to which it is attached and secured by nine supporters, correspondent with the columns below. This head consists of eight plain squares, each having a diamond or lozenge within it, extending from right to left.

Immediately under this projection is the first row of pannels, forming the upper division of the compartments. Each of these, except the fourth, contains a carved grotesque head, surrounded by mantling, and differing but little in the fancy of the patterns throughout. The fourth pannel bears an ornamental oval shield, supported by two lions, but entirely destitute of armorial bearing, or any other kind of charge.

The cross ribs were originally ornamented with small pilasters, extending half way upwards, having globular heads, from which arose a continuation of plain square work to the top of the wainscot. These pilasters remain perfect on the fifth and seventh cross ribs only.

Immediately below the first division of pannels just described is the second, extending also along the left side and front of the door-case, containing detached portions of the following inscription: "*Slepe : not : till : ye : hathe : consederd : how : thow : hast : spent : ye : day : past : if : thow : have : well :*"

⁴ See Plate II.



Designed by Geo. Gilbert

Etched by W. Perry

OAK CARVINGS IN THE GREAT HALL OF SPEKE

don : thank : God ; if : other : ways : repent : ye ;”—and below these, again, is the third row.

The third or principal line of pannels, consisting of six in number, has each pannel ornamented with an exquisitely carved fancy bust, in bold relief, surrounded by mantling and scroll-work ; the second, fifth, and sixth pannel, being additionally embellished with masks, of a correspondent style and execution, very similar to those observed on the beams and timbers in the roofs of our ancient cathedrals.

Beneath these, again, are two other rows of small narrow pannels, the upper one ornamented with fancy carving, and the lower one plain ; both extending through the length of the work, and forming the base of the whole. Immediately below are the seat and foot-board, formed of three rows of plain pannels, some of which have perished or have been removed.

The magnificent columns, which divide the wainscot into compartments, arise from square ornamental pedestals, and are fluted in two divisions along their shafts ; they are surmounted by capitals having volutes and rows of foliage, somewhat approaching the Corinthian order of architecture,⁵ and support scrolls finished with massy square heads, increasing in diameter upwards, and reaching to the bottom of the first row of pannels.

The door-case is formed of two divisions of columns upon columns, similar to those of the wainscot, excepting that the shafts are ornamented in zig-zag carving, instead of being fluted. In the centre, over the door, is an ornamented shield, with the arms of Norris, quartering Harrington, Molyneux, and two others which I cannot at present decypher, supported by two non-descript heraldic animals, in form like the unicorn, though without horns.⁶

⁵ Seacome describes these columns as containing *all the five orders of architecture* ; his account could not have been given from ocular examination.

⁶ Mr Watt, of Bishop Burton, in Yorkshire, the proprietor of the estates of Speke and some others in the neighbourhood, in reply to a letter from me on the subject of the library, says—“ In answer to your inquiries respecting the wainscot at Speke, I am sorry I can give no satisfactory information, having no writings in my possession that throw the least light on the question. Ever since I can remember, it has been said that the wainscot was brought from the Palace of Holyrood by Sir Edward Norris, after the battle of Flodden ; but this rests entirely on tradition, as far as I know. The large carved pannels, in common with the rest of the wainscot in the hall, were much broken and defaced, one half of some of them being split down the middle and taken out. They were renewed, as well as I can recollect, with some

The dining-room is of good size, and the ceiling exhibits some curious workmanship in stucco. It remains, however, in a ruinous condition, while the hall has been restored and repaired with considerable taste and skill by its present owner, who occasionally resides there.

Over the chimney-piece of this room is a second very handsome specimen of oak carving, scarcely less beautiful in its execution than that of the hall.⁷

This piece appears to represent the pedigree of the Norris family for three generations, as may be collected from the remains of the inscription, and the genealogical table accompanying this inquiry.⁸ It consists of three principal compartments, separated from each other by pairs of square columns, having their interstices occupied by beautiful arabesque foliage of different patterns, the whole resting upon a base correspondent with the extent of the fire-place, and finished with carvings of a similar kind to those already described as filling the spaces between the columns. Along the cornice formerly ran an inscription, painted upon canvass, explanatory of the figures in the compartments; but this is now entirely gone, and the wood-work to which it was attached is in several places broken through and fallen to decay.

As much as appeared yet legible in 1802 has been decyphered by Mr Hinchcliffe, in the 14th volume of the *Archæologia*, and runs as follows, beginning with the principal compartment on the left hand, each pair of columns, with its space between, projecting about five or six inches, so as to admit of a few words being contained on their sides as well as on their fronts.

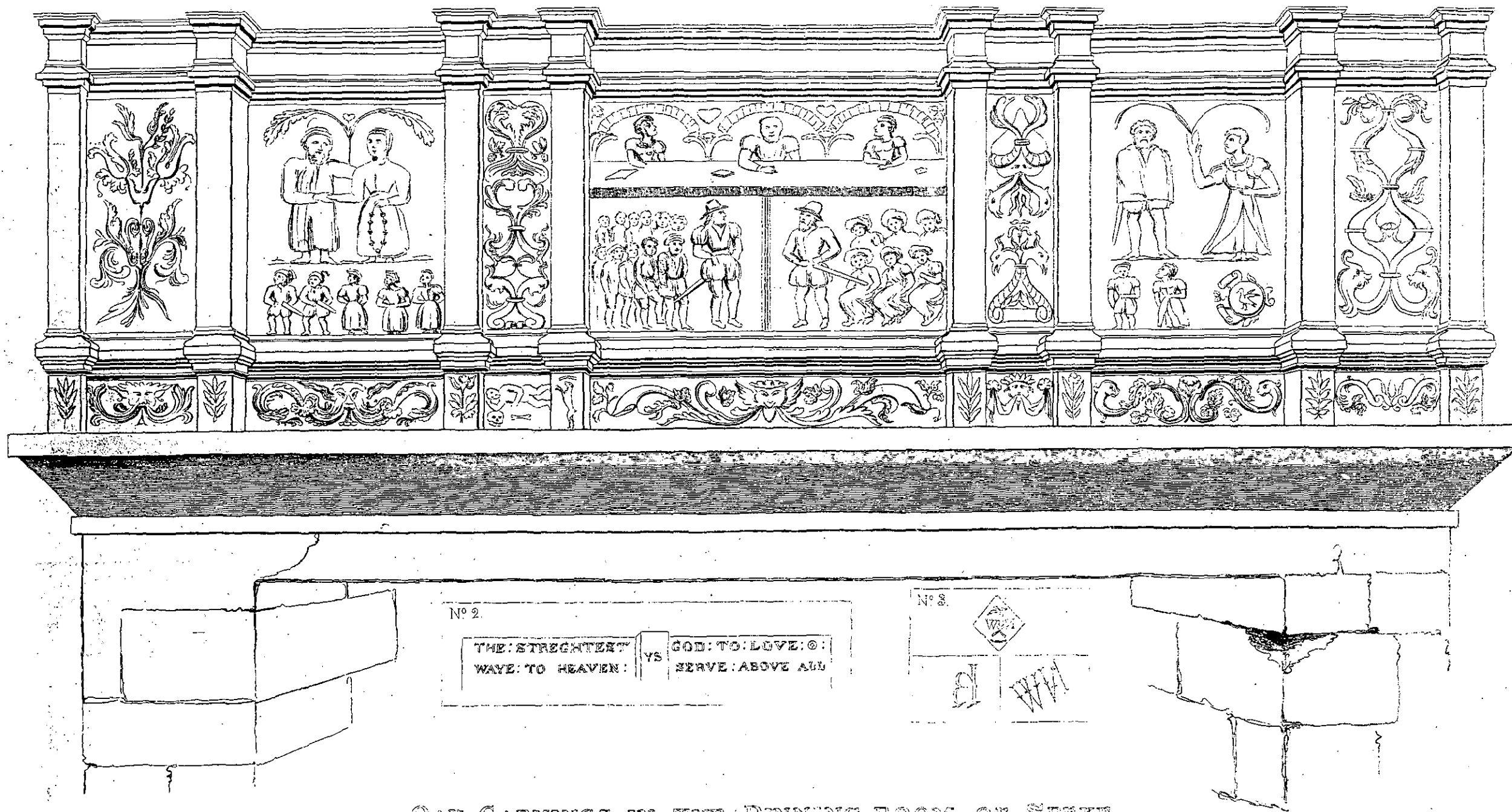
“ *who married Clemens, one of the X daughters*
and heirs of Sir James Harrington,
who had
by her

sort of composition, when the room was restored, 14 or 15 years since, under the direction of the late Mr Bullock of Liverpool; but very many among them are quite perfect.”

“ With respect to the library, there were no books at Speke since it came into my family. The interior of the house was very much destroyed by the people (farmers and others) that the Beauclerk family allowed to live there; all the tapestry, and an inlaid oak floor, belonging to what is called the Stucco Parlour, being taken to pieces, *the one for fire-wood, and the other for horse-sheets*, as I have always been told.”

⁷ See Plate III.

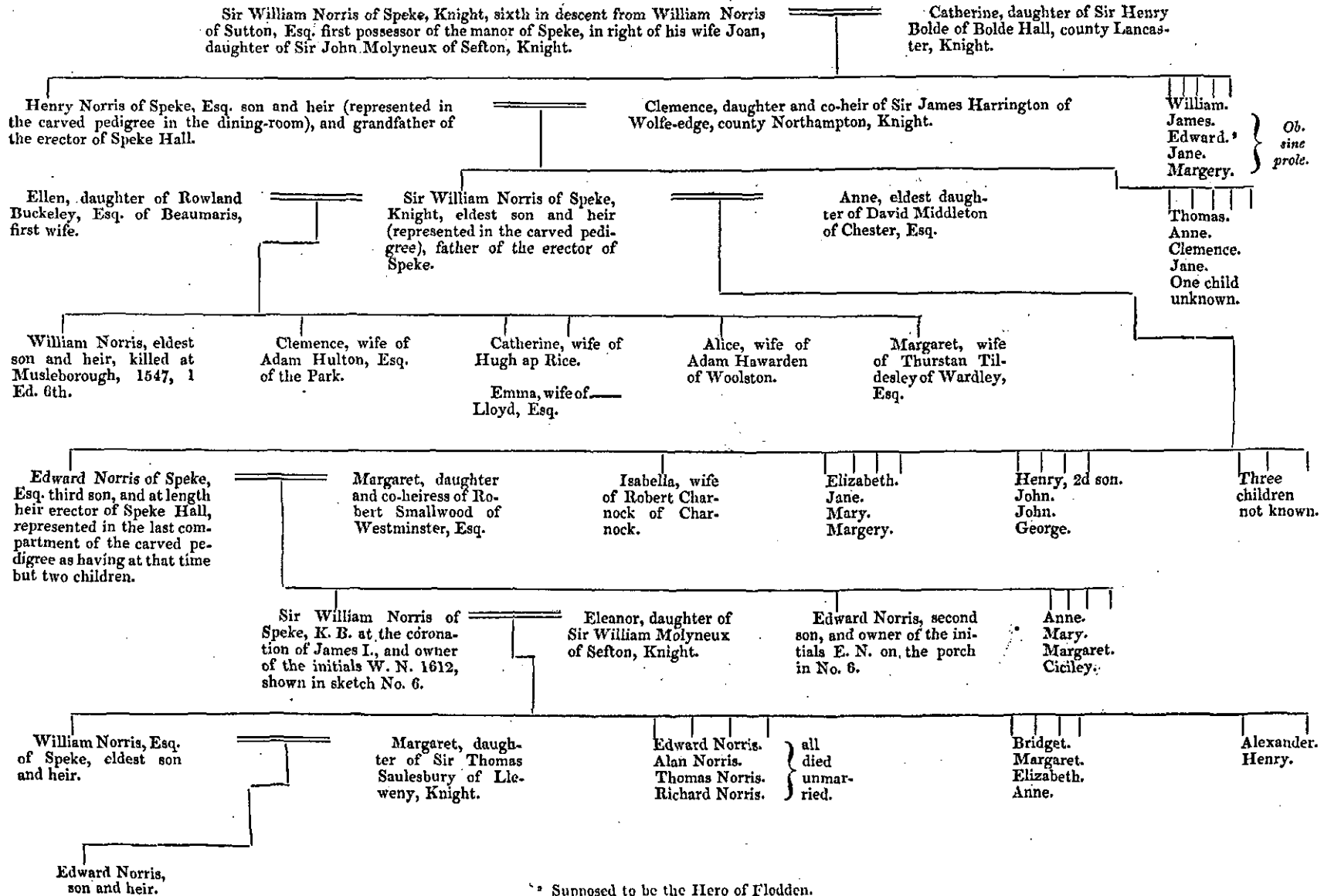
⁸ See the opposite page.



OAK CARVINGS IN THE DINNING-ROOM OF SPEKE

1112 411

PEDIGREE OF THE FAMILY OF NORRIS OF SPEKE.



* Supposed to be the Hero of Flodden.

*William Norris,
Thomas, Anne, Clemens,
and Jane Norris."*

Here follows a chasm in the canvass, which I would venture to supply by inserting the name of "*William Norris*" merely; and then comes the principal central compartment, in which the inscription proceeds thus:—

" Had two wives, Elen daughter of Roland Buckeleye, Esquire, and after married one of the daughters and heirs of David Middleton, alderman of Chester, and by these two he had nineteen children."

Here another chasm ensues, all being effaced till we come to the next projecting compartment on the right hand, where the inscription goes on with

*" This
bringeth
us to*

Edward, the third son and heyre of the latter, who, after the Death of William and¹⁰ his two Brethren, married Margaret, Daughter of Robert Smallwood, Esquire."

The name of the person who married Clemens, the daughter of Sir James Harrington, does not appear on the canvass; but by a reference to the genealogical table, it is evident that it was "*Henry*."

Thomas, Anne, Clemens, Jane, and the child unknown, the issue of Henry and Clemens, are no-doubt intended to be represented by the five small figures in the compartment on the left; as William Norris, the eldest son and heir, with his two wives and nineteen children, is designed to appear in the centre.

In the third compartment we have Edward Norris and his wife Margaret Smallwood, with two of their children. The circumstance of the remainder of the space to the right being occupied by a shield, charged with the crest of the family, may perhaps be meant to indicate that they had no more than two children born at the period of the erection of the mantelpiece in 1598, though by the genealogical table they seem eventually to have had at least six.

In this room also, over the door, we observe one of those monitory sentences usual in these situations, engraven in characters similar to those in the hall, "*The : streghtest : waye : to : Heaven : ys : God : to : love : and : serve :*

¹⁰ Henry.

above: all."¹¹ These lines are introduced where the frieze is usually placed, and the short space between is occasioned by a projection of the joiner's work, running upwards and dividing them through their centre.

An archway of stone-work forms the back entrance to the hall of Speke, the style of which is Grecian; and though rude in appearance, at the time of its erection it was doubtless considered a handsome specimen of architecture.¹² Upon it are these letters and date, "E: N: 1605; M: N:"—the initials of Edward Norris, Esq. and Margaret Smallwood.

The front of another porch also, at the back of the house, is marked "W: N: E: N: 1612;" very probably the initials of the erector's two sons, William and Edward.

The reasons I shall beg leave to submit to the consideration of the Society, as tending to contradict the tradition of the Wainscot and Library having been brought from Scotland, are eightfold, and as follow:

1st, That the battle of Flodden took place so early as the 9th of September 1513, and consequently eighty-five years before the hall was erected.

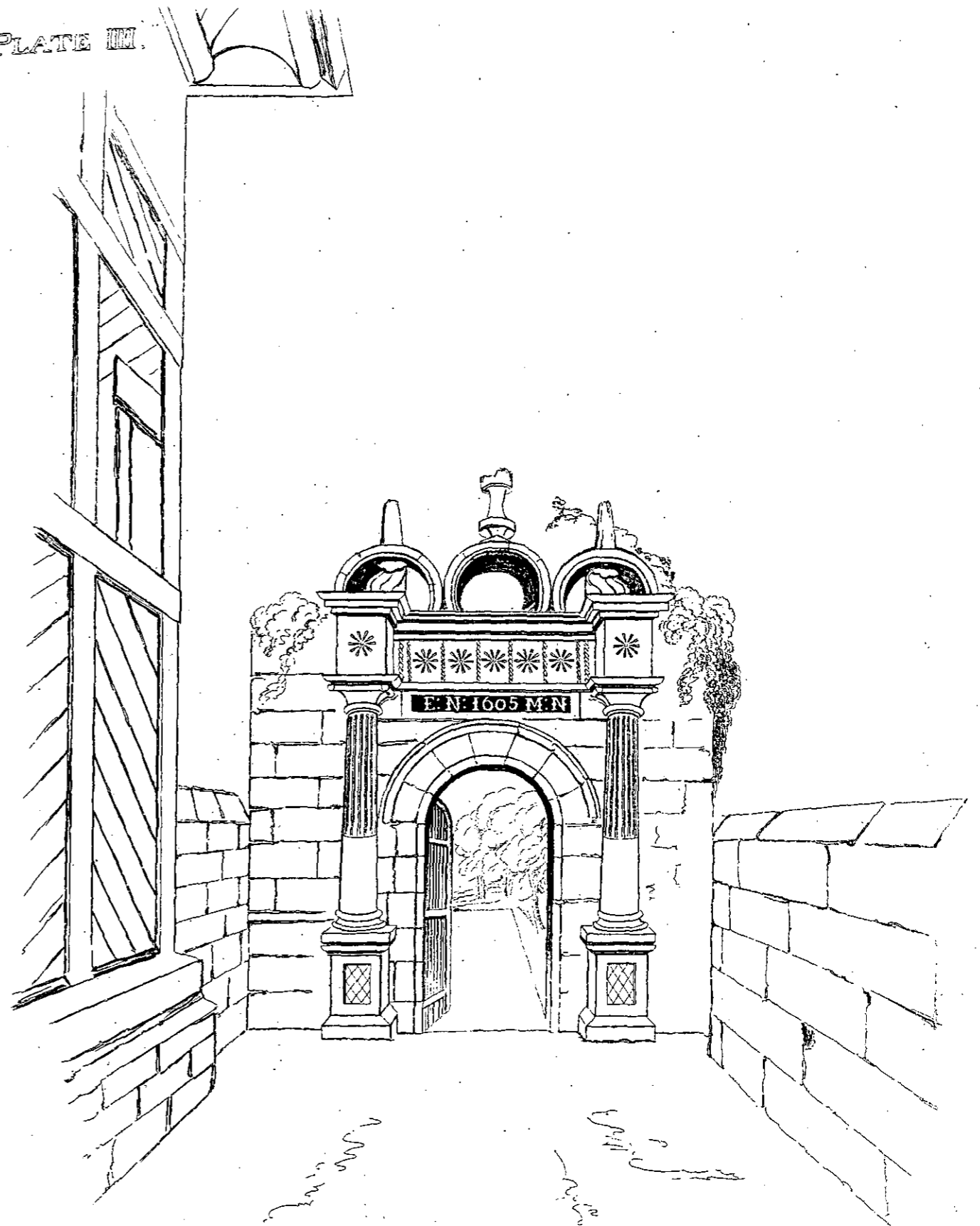
2dly, That the field of battle, the most northerly point the English forces reached on that expedition, is situated in the county of Northumberland, in England, and distant from Edinburgh not less than sixty miles; and that, as the army, according to Holinshed and other authorities, both English and Scottish; left the field immediately after the action, and marched homewards, it is difficult to comprehend how they could have carried a library and furniture from the Royal Palace at Edinburgh, which city they never visited.

3dly, That the hall of Speke appears, by the inscription over the west porch, certainly to have been erected by Edward Norris, Esq. in the year 1598; and it is therefore extremely probable, from the appearance of the armorial bearing over the door-case in the great hall, the canvass inscription and crest on the mantelpiece, as well as from the several dates and initials left by him in various situations throughout the building,¹³ that the same person, at the same period, put up both the wainscot in the hall and the carved pedigree over the chimney-piece in the dining-room.

¹¹ See Plate III. No. 2.

¹² See Plate IV.

¹³ See Plate III. No. 3. for a device of crest and initials "W. N.," which are repeated five times in a very high window in the Great Hall. The other letters also are on windows in the Great Hall.



Sketched by Geo. Nicholson

Etched by W. Perry

BACK ENTRANCE TO SPEKE HALL.

4thly, That according to the best authorities who have given opinions on the subject, the introduction of ornamental carved oaken wainscot, though long common in ecclesiastical buildings, did not take place in halls and mansions as a substitute for tapestry hangings until the reign of Elizabeth,—a period consistent with the aforesaid date in the hall.

5thly, That, independently of the date of 1598, numerous specimens of the carved oaken wainscot, of the period mentioned, are now existing in different parts of the counties of Lancaster and Chester, in very perfect preservation, and, from the close similarity of their style and decorations to those I have described, afford evidence against the supposition of their having been put up so early as 1513. Two of these specimens are here shortly described:—

1st, *Smithells Hall, near Bolton*.—"Two sides of the quadrangle of this Hall were built in the reign of Edward VI. They contain a dining-room and some chambers, and have been subsequently fitted up by Sir Andrew Barton, in the richest style of wainscot work known in the period in which he lived. The pannels are fluted in relief, and finished at top with a rich Gothic cornice. Beneath are the cyphers of the Bartons and Radcliffes, together with many heads in profile, well cut in wood, and inclosed in medallions."

2d, *Little Mitton Hall*.—"The Hall, with the embayed windows, screen, and gallery, is of the finest Gothic order; the roof is ceiled with oak of wrought compartments; the principals turned in the form of obtuse Gothic arches; the posterns deeply fluted, and their capitals enriched with carving; the walls covered with wainscot; and the bay-windows adorned with armorial bearings in painted glass. The screen is extremely rich; upon the pannels of it are carved, in bold relief, ten heads, male and female, within medallions, which have a rude kind of character, and were perhaps intended for portraits. Annexed to them are the following cyphers, belonging to the reign of Elizabeth, with which the pattern of the wainscot exactly synchronizes, *D H T H T H*, belonging probably to the Holts of Grislehurst, owners of that estate in the reign of Edward VI. and Elizabeth, and brought thence in the last century."

Farther examples of this kind may be seen in the Halls of Altham, Salisbury, Radcliffe Tower, Hoghton Tower, Stonyhurst, though never completed, Dunkenhalth, Gawthorp, and Clayton; Agecroft, and Hulme, near Manchester; besides nearly an equal number in the county of Chester.

6thly, That Seacome's History of the House of Stanley, where the tradi-

tion appears to have originated, is manifestly full of inaccuracies and misrepresentations, arising principally from his being a person of but little education, and not competent to the writing a work of that nature, and, therefore, ought not to be implicitly relied on.

7thly, That subsequent authors who have mentioned the tradition, as Enfield, Gough, Gregson, Baines, and others, have followed Seacome's account, and are therefore responsible for the propagation of the tale since his time.

And, 8thly, That this kind of tradition is by no means a solitary instance in the county, the following, among others, resting on a similar and equally absurd foundation, is a sufficient proof:—

“In the windows of Middleton Church are many scattered remains of painted glass, the most remarkable of which, as to the subject, is nearly perfect. It consists of seventeen kneeling figures, in compartments of eight and nine, facing each other, at the head of one of which is a Priest; the others are stiff, sturdy looking yeomen, each having his long bow resting on one end beside him, and on a label his name above. There is a prevalent and constant tradition throughout the district, *that the figures in the window were intended to represent the archers who attended Sir Richard Assheton to Flodden Field.*”—Whitaker's *History of Whalley*, p. 525.

On examining with attention an inscription, placed on one side, it plainly appears that the memory of these worthy personages was revered and preserved for a far more peaceful deed. It runs thus,—“*Orate pro bono statu Ricardi Assheton et eorum qui hanc fenestram fieri fecerunt, quorum nomina et cognomina supra ostenduntur. Anno Dni. MCCCCCV.*”

As the battle of Flodden did not take place until eight years after this window was finished, farther comment would appear unnecessary. Yet Doctor Whitaker, the historian of Whalley, to my infinite surprise, notwithstanding the evidence of the inscription, “biassed,” as he declares, “by feeling more than reason,” was in favour of the tradition rather than the inscription, though so clearly explanatory of the nature, purport, and date of the painting;—so prone are some Antiquaries to attach credit to a favourite hypothesis, and to habituate themselves to sanction speculations which their judgment and conviction contradict.

For the foregoing reasons, therefore, I conclude that the carvings at Speke were executed for Edward Norris, Esq., in the year 1598, 40th of Elizabeth, and not transported thither by Sir Edward Norris, his great uncle, who

said to have been preserved at Speke Hall, Lancashire.

fought at Flodden, or by any other person, from any place whatsoever;—and that the origin of the tradition respecting the plundering of the King's palace at Holyrood, and the removal of his library and furniture, is yet a desideratum to the Antiquary.

I have the honor to be,

Sir,

Your most humble Servant,

WILLIAM ROBERT WHATTON.

ED. W. A. DRUMMOND HAY, Esq.

Secretary to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

[Note by the Editor.—In the preceding inquiry Mr Whatton has shown but too satisfactorily that no books from the Library of King James IV. are now preserved in Speke Hall, and that the carvings there belong to the close of the 16th century, and consequently could not possibly have been brought from the Palace of Holyrood in September 1513. With regard to the tradition itself, we may perhaps be allowed to hazard one observation, in the view of offering a solution of the difficulty under which this question appears to remain. If conjecture, therefore, in such a case be admissible, the probability is, that some Relics brought from Scotland had been set up at Speke previous to the erection of the present Manor Hall in 1598; and as these would no doubt be transferred to the new building, it might so happen in the course of time, that what was strictly applicable to a part, may have been currently ascribed to the whole. If such were the case, it is no uncommon thing to find in tradition two distant events confounded together, and the Relics in question might truly enough have been brought “from the King of Scots' Palace,” after the death, not of James IV., but of his son James V. It is at least well known, that during the Earl of Hertford's expedition into Scotland, in May 1544, when the towns of Edinburgh, Leith, and suburbs were destroyed, the Abbey, as well as the Palace of Holyrood, fell a prey to the flames; and (according to a contemporary authority) “*innumerable bootyes, spoyles, and pillages were brought from thense*” by the English troops, “notwithstanding the abundance,” it is added, “which we consumed with fyre.”

On this occasion, one trophy carried off from the Abbey of Holyrood, was a fine brazen font, which Sir Richard Lea, knight, captain of the English pioneers, presented to the Church of St Alban's in Hertfordshire, with the following inscription, some-

what in "the vein of Ancient Pistol," commemorative of the proud origin of the relic, and of the degradation to which it was doomed.

"CUM LAETHIA, OPPIDUM APUD SCOTOS NON INCELEBRE, ET EDINBURGUS PRIMARIA APUD EOS CIVITAS INCENDIO CONFLAGRARENT, RICARDUS LEUS, EQUES AURATUS, ME FLAMMIS EREPTUM AD ANGLOS PERDUXIT. HUIUS EGO TANTI BENEFICII MEMOR, NON NISI REGUM LIBEROS LAVARE SOLITUS, NUNC MEAM OPERAM ETIAM INFIMIS ANGLORUM LIBENTER CONDIXI. LEUS VICTOR SIC VOLUIT. VALE. ANNO DOMINI MDXLIII, ET ANNO REGNI HENRICI OCTAVI XXXVI." *i. e.* "When Leith, a town of some importance, and Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland, were consumed by fire, Sir Richard Lee, Knight of the Garter, rescued me from the flames, and brought me to England. Not forgetfull of this favour, I, who was accustomed to baptize only the children of kings, now submit to do the same office even to the meanest of the English nation. LEE the Conqueror has so ordained. Farewell. A. D. 1543-4. 36 Hen. VIII."

This font, a century afterwards, fell into the hands of Cromwell's soldiers during the civil war, and was probably destroyed by them for the sake of the metal.¹

Whether any of the Norris family were concerned in the expedition of 1544, cannot now perhaps be ascertained: it appears, however, from the Pedigree at page 7 of this Inquiry, that William Norris was killed during the subsequent expedition of 1547. In Mr Hinchliffe's communication to the Society of London Antiquaries, where mention is made of the prevalence of the tradition, "that part of the carved ornaments at Speke were brought from Scotland," he adds, "It may be as well to remark, that in the great hall there are two figures of Angels, entirely gilt, in form such as are introduced under consoles in rich Gothic architecture, above the wainscot, which, according to the fashion of the day when it was executed, does not reach to the ceiling, and evidently making no part in the general scheme of the decoration." (Archæologia, XIV. 22.) These figures, as Mr Hinchliffe suggests, might have been trophies brought from Scotland; but unfortunately, as we learn by a subsequent communication from Mr Whatton, these Angels were removed from Speke Hall before his sketches were made, in 1827, and as he could then get no tidings of them, it is to be feared they had been destroyed.]

¹ Camden's *Britannia*, by Gough, vol. I. p. 338; Maitland's *Hist. of Edinb.* p. 148; *Provincial Antiquities*, by Sir W. Scott, p. 119.