

THE ARCHIEPISCOPAL MANOR HOUSE AT CHARING.*

BY JOHN SAYER OF PETT PLACE, ESQ.

As time will not allow me to say anything of the history of this Manor House, now commonly called a Palace, I must confine myself to pointing out such ruins of the Archbishop's House as still remain. Yet I may say, that the ground whereon we stand, traditionally said to have been granted to the Church by Vortigern in the fifth century, was certainly restored or given to the Church of Christ in Canterbury by Kenulph in the year 788, and remained in the hands of the Archbishop and the Prior and Monks of Christ Church, Canterbury, for over 750 years, until it was, by Archbishop Cranmer, surrendered to King Henry VIII. in the 36th year of his reign, 1545.

Domesday Book tells us that the Archbishop himself held Charing in demesne, that is in his own hands; and in the notitia of the cathedral lands it is styled *proprium manerium archiepiscopi*, as being appropriated for the Archbishop's own personal use; and from that time until the surrender by Cranmer this house seems to have been a favourite residence of successive Archbishops. It is, however, worthy of notice that the village street must probably have established itself on its present site prior to the Manor House having become an Archbishop's residence, for the Palace boundary wall on that side runs just at the back of the houses in the street, only joining the high-road where the houses end, and the so-called Palace may have been originally only a court lodge or steward's house before it attained the dignity of a residence of the Lord of the Manor in person.

Of the buildings before you the distinguishing features are those of the style which we have learnt to call Decorated architecture, with perhaps a few earlier remains, being probably built at intervals between the years 1250 and 1450.

* A paper read before the Kent Archæological Society, July 1883, in that part of the Manor House which is now used as a barn.

A large portion of the buildings may, I think, be assigned to Archbishop Stratford, 1333-1348, for Charing is said to have been his favourite residence; and the Court Rolls at Lambeth mention courts which were held here in person by Chicheley, Stafford, Kemp, and Bourgechier, 1408-1479. Archbishop Stafford, in the 22nd year of Henry VI., obtained the grant of two fairs to be held at Charing on the eve, day, and morrow of St. Luke and St. George, which fairs have only been discontinued within the last few years.

The gateway, through which we pass into the buildings, I take to be of the middle of the fourteenth century, with perhaps portions of earlier work. Writers have spoken of the Tudor gateway, but you will observe this is not a four-centred Tudor arch, but one of an earlier character.

You will specially notice the remains of the fire-place in the room above the gateway, with the tiles placed herring-bone fashion at the back, and the delicately carved corbels of the hood over the fire-place—workmanship, as I apprehend, of about the middle of the fourteenth century. The room, warmed by this fire-place, with its large window looking out over the gateway, of which some vestiges still remain, must have been an apartment of considerable size, and must, I think, have been the Archbishop's audience chamber, the room where he received his clergy, held his courts, and transacted official business. The way up to this room is unknown, for I can find no traces of a staircase.

It is impossible to assign the precise use of the buildings now converted into cottages and stables running to the westward of the great gateway; amongst them, here and there, will be found some of the oldest stone work about the place. Former writers have spoken of these buildings as cloisters; but this was no conventual building, and would have no cloisters in a conventual sense.

What I may call the residential or domestic portion of the Manor House was no doubt the block of buildings which faces the gateway, now occupied as a farmhouse by Mr. Day, to whose courtesy and kindness we are indebted for the privilege of wandering over his premises. Leland says of Cardinal Morton that he "made great buildings at Charing," and here, I think, you must look for them in the red and black brick work now chiefly covered with ivy, being brick work similar in character to Morton's well-known gateway at Lambeth. Looking round on the remains of older buildings, I think you will say that Leland and some other writers who have

spoken of Morton's buildings have given the Cardinal credit at Charing for more than he deserves.

On the north side of the house of residence stood the chapel, of which only some traces of the undercroft now remain; the distinguishing features of the chapel have vanished since Hasted's time (1796), who says, "The walls are standing entire, being built of squared stone mixed with flint. In the side wall are three windows with pointed arches, and at the east end a much larger one of the same form." All this is now gone; the east end was standing some fifty years ago, and was then taken down as dangerous.

The most striking feature of the Palace must have been its great dining hall, now converted into a barn and oast house. The principal entrance to the hall, with narrow windows on either side, is a very remarkable building, and rather an antiquarian puzzle. You will notice the blocked up remains of one very fine and large Decorated window in the hall. The dais must have been at the north end, and was reached by a private communication from the dwelling house. In the south wall you will see curious passages and stairs in the thickness of the masonry, leading probably to the minstrels' gallery and perhaps to sleeping apartments in the adjoining building. The great gap in the east wall, now boarded up, marks the communication between the hall and the kitchens and offices; it is said that the foundations of the kitchen, shewing an octagonal form, were found in the orchard close adjoining.

Here was the scene of numberless royal banquets and princely hospitalities of which few records have come down to us. King Henry VII. was entertained here, on the 24th March 1507, by Archbishop Warham. Here also was Henry VIII. lodged and feasted by the same Archbishop, on his way to the Field of the Cloth of Gold.

After its surrender to the King, by Cranmer in 1545, the fee of the Manor remained in the Crown till granted out by King Charles I.; having been in the interval leased out to tenants, by whom the buildings were adapted to private use, in 1586 and later.

I may sum up my notes by quoting the words of my friend Mr. Cave Browne, in his book on the Palaces of the Primacy:

"How little conception of the grandeur of this palace, when it had monarchs for its guests, do the present ruins convey. The dilapidated gateway, the skeleton of a banqueting hall, the tradition of a chapel, are all that remain, and yet we may linger, not without interest over even these relics of departed glory."