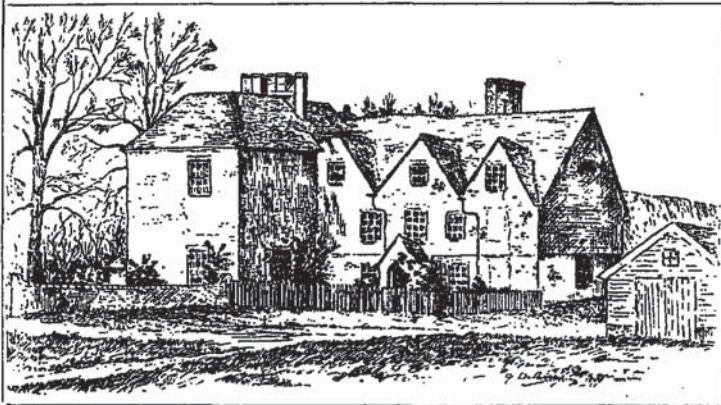


EARLSTONE MANOR HOUSE,
BURGHCLERE.

BY WALTER MONEY, F.S.A.

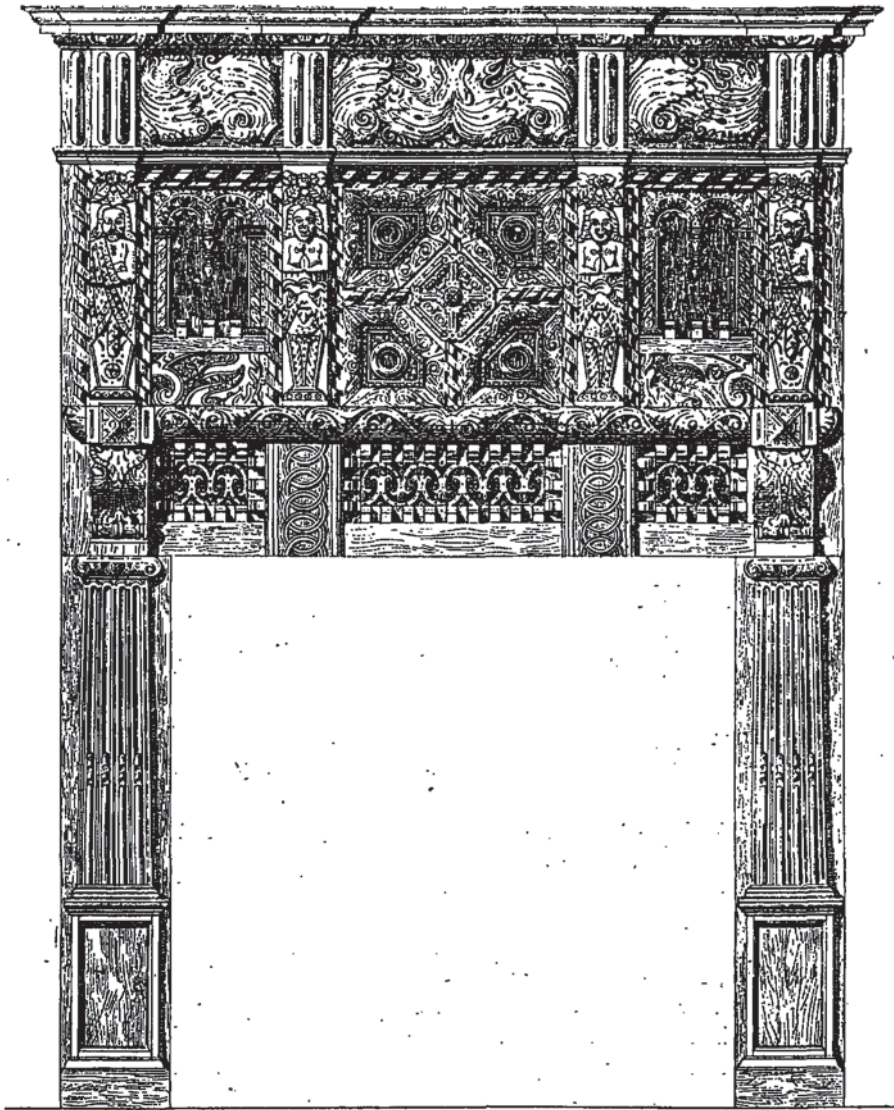


Within about a mile from the Highclere station, but in the parish of Burghclere, amidst a world of wood and overhanging trees, in a little hollow, as it were, in the upland slope as if to give it that snug and protected air of which our ancestors were so fond, there stands the old manor-house of Earlstone. On the western side of this solitary and secluded valley rises the stately tower of the modern castle of the Herberts, crowning finely its imposing elevation, and looking into far-off scenes, while on the neighbouring hills can be discerned the ancient avenue of trees which alone remains to indicate the once fine old mansion-house of the noble family of Lisle, which many years ago was demolished amid the regrets of the whole neighbourhood. Each one of these places has its own story, and the three combined tell of England's changes from feudal warfare to the internal peace which succeeded the union of the Roses, when manor-houses arose instead of castles, and from the comparative rudeness of the time to the art and taste of the present. But as taste

and security have grown, again we see those lowly-placed old manor-houses deserted, and the proprietor once more mounted on a neighbouring hill, not like his ancestors for strength, but for fineness of situation.

It was towards the close of a beautiful autumn day, as the old woods deeply cast their evening gloom around, that taking our way down a footpath, through some pleasant fields, we unexpectedly came upon the old house at Earlstone. One could see at a glance that it belonged to an age when it required moat and mound to resist an enemy, who was probably at the same time the neighbour, and there hung about it a hush and a solitude that told us as plainly it had long ceased to be the abode of its ancient line. That the high, the brave, the happy and unhappy who had so long made it alive and filled it with a thousand memories were blotted out of remembrance, save a brief record of their genealogy in the history of the country, and some fragments of mysterious traditions that float about amongst the common people, but which are also fast fading away.

So far as can be judged from an ancient chimney-stack and other features, Earlstone is a specimen of a large class of old manor-houses which were built in the early part of the reign of James the First. At this period the houses of what may be termed the middling sort of gentry presented many peculiar and attractive features, both with regard to arrangement and decoration. They were lined, as at Earlstone, with oak-panelled wainscotting, had carved chimneypieces of an elaborate character, a beautiful example remaining in one of the upper rooms, is here illustrated, and even stained-glass windows. Moreover, in addition to the principal apartments, there was sometimes added a state bedroom and sometimes even a drawing-room. The handsome Jacobean chimney piece here figured the chief relic of the former grandeur of the house, consists of an overmantle of three panels supported on Ionic columns, and divided by grotesque Atlantes, surmounted by a cornice. The whole carved in oak. A large sum was recently offered for this fine specimen of the carvers art, but it is not likely to be accepted by the present noble owner the Earl of Carnarvon.



JACOBEOAN MANTEL PICEE, EARLSTONE MANOR HOUSE.

In its original state "Earlstone House," as it is designated in the old one-inch Ordnance maps, appears to have consisted of a central front and west wing, which formerly reached to the outer garden wall, with extensive outbuildings and a courtyard. The old house has however been strangely metamorphosed. Two large rooms were built on for the accommodation of shooting parties from the Castle. The interior still retains some curious old woodwork, and cornices, and an examination would no doubt reveal evidences of secret chambers and "bolt holes" invariably provided in old Roman Catholic houses. The house is entirely surrounded by a moat, enclosing a large area, fed by springs which rise on the spot, and which at the back of the house spread their waters into a large fish-pond, covering nearly an acre of ground. It was guarded on the side of its principal approach by a drawbridge, thrown over the moat formerly much deeper and wider than at present—now represented by a modern bridge. On the west side of the moat are the remains of an ancient fish stew, now choked up with mud and weeds, and wild with flags and the black spear-heads of the ball clubrush. This enclosed place is thought by the *genius loci* to have been a "bath," but its purpose is obvious, it being very essential that fish should be always ready at hand on fasting days for those professing the old religion.

For many generations the old manor-house was occupied by the ancient and honourable Lancashire family of Beconshaw, of that ilk, as often written Beckinsale, who migrated from the former county into Hampshire in the early part of the sixteenth century, and were staunch adherents to the Papists. John Beconshaw, the first of his line settled in this county, is described as of Southampton. His second son John was Scholar of Winchester, Fellow of New College, 1520—38, and Professor of Greek in the University of Paris. He died at Sherborne St. John in 1559, and was buried in the church there. The youngest brother Walter, settled at Hartley Wespall. John Beconshaw of Earlstone, the head of the family, grandson of Edward, brother to the Fellow of New College, married Anne daughter to Nicholas Tichborne, of Hartley Maudit, whose ancient manor-house

went to decay some centuries ago, but there are still some traces of its park and gardens. By this lady he had two sons, Peter who is described as of Earlstone, and Benjamin.

The name of this John Beconshaw of Earlstone, with others of his family, appears in a list of Popish Recusants printed in London in 1578, as having been in confinement at the White Lion Prison, Southwark, for more than two years, also Peter Tichborne, while William Beconshaw and Nicholas Tichborne, father-in-law to John Beconshaw, had been for some time in prison at Winchester. There is matter for a fine romance in the stirring nature of the times, and in the lives of these unfortunate men, who, brought up with the most devoted notions of the claims of the Roman Catholic Church, were prepared to endure even the extremity of the law rather than be deprived of the exercise of their religion. The money extracted from the Beconshaws as "Obstinate Recusants,"—£20 a month,—equal to £240 of our present coinage, must have sadly impoverished their fortunes. In the year 1589. Nicholas Tichborne, the father-in-law of John Beconshaw of Earlstone, died. He had been in the gaol at Winchester nine years, a prisoner, as he says himself in his petition for relief, "for not repairing unto my parish church," or, as the sheriff puts it, "in execution for a great sum of money due unto Her Majesty for reason of his recusancy." It is evident that the fortunes of the Beconshaws were ruined by the penalties of recusancy, but some of them appear to have continued to live at Earlstone, where, in better times, they led a quiet country life in farming their own lands, or in coursing hares on the neighbouring downs. Frank and pleasant people they would seem to have been, fond of their country, but clinging through every turn of fortune to their mother church. We have not had an opportunity of looking through the registers of Burghclere for the name of Beconshaw, but we remember noticing a slab on the floor of Highclere old Church, commemorating Peter Beconshaw, of Earlstone, Gent., who died 19th March, 1641, aged 68. He was the son of John Beconshaw of Earlstone, by Anne, daughter of Nicholas

Tichborne, to whose recusancy and death in Winchester gaol we have already referred.¹

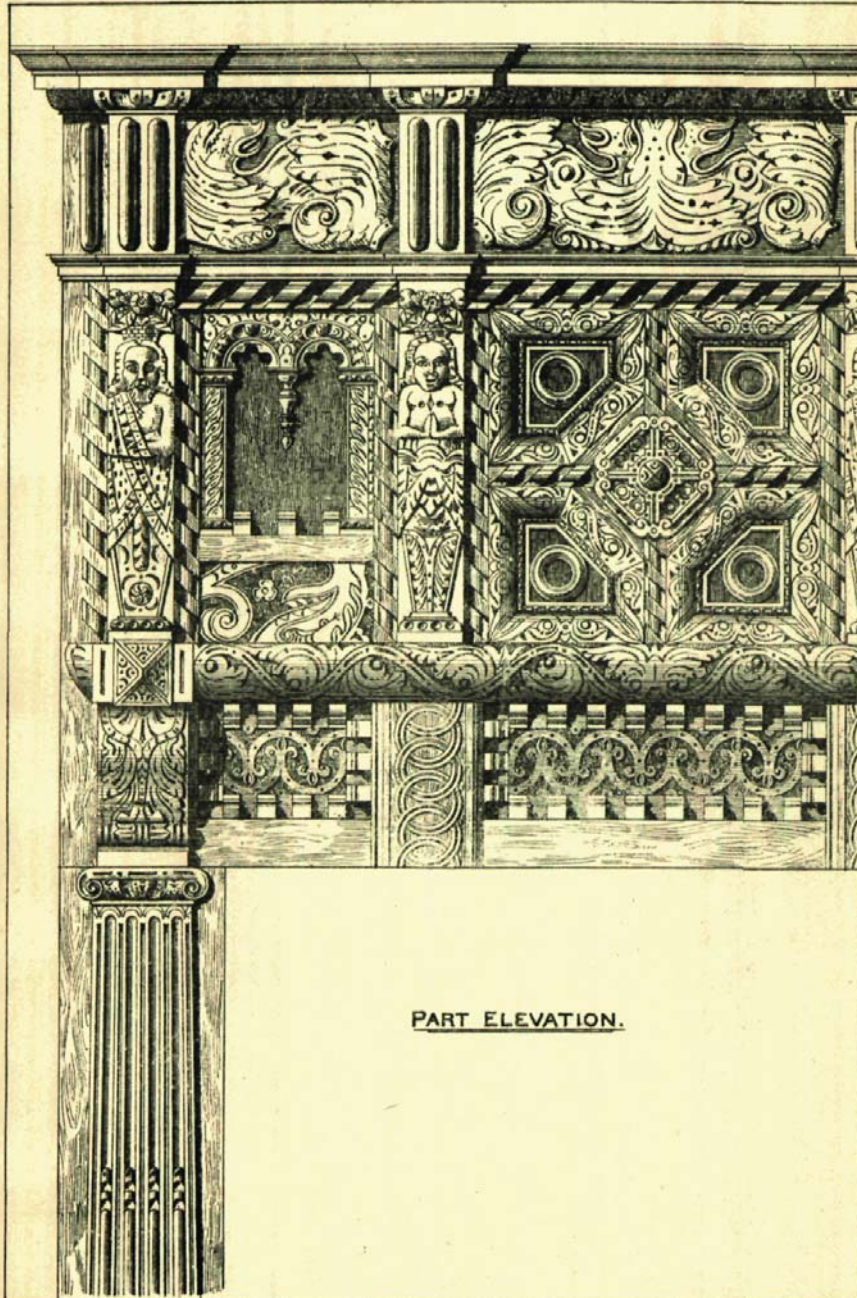
A few words may now be said as to the connection of the Beconshaws with the ancient family of Lisle of Moyles Court and Crux Easton, to which we have slightly adverted in our opening remarks. By the marriage of William Beconshaw, of Ibsley, near Fordingbridge, M.P. for Lymington, and High Sheriff of Hants, 1634, grandson to Walter Beconshaw of Hartley Westpall; with Alice, daughter and heiress of William White of Moyles Court, the latter historic property came into the possession of the Beconshaws. Of this William and Alice Beconshaw there were three children, Catherine wife to William Jenkins of Avon, near Christchurch, Dorothy, wife to David Budden, and White Beconshaw, knighted at Whitehall, 15th February, 1627. Alice Beconshaw, daughter and co-heiress of Sir White Beconshaw, became the wife of John Lisle, who sat in the Long Parliament, had been a Commissioner of Great Seal, was one of the judges of Charles I., and created a lord by Cromwell, whom he swore in as Lord Protector. How he fled the kingdom on the return of Charles II. to England, and with Ludlow, Goff, Whalley, and another, took refuge in Switzerland, where he was assassinated by certain hired ruffians, belongs to the general history of the time. By this marriage Moyles Court was brought into the Lisle family. This Alice Lisle, née Beconshaw, was the unfortunate lady who was brought up before the infamous Judge Jeffries on the charge of treason for having given shelter to Hicks and Nelthorpe, two fugitives from the field of Sedgemoor.²

John, Lord Lisle, the regicide, and husband of Alice Lisle, was the son of Sir William Lisle, a devoted royalist, and uncle to Edward Lisle, of Crux Easton, of whom we shall have a word to say at a later stage.

¹ The Rev. Canon Blunt, Rector of Burghclere, writes:—"As far as I can see there are no entries of Beconshaw baptisms, marriages, or burials in our Registers. If they were stiff Roman Catholics would not this account for there being no entries here? It seems to me that some Arundells and Cornwallis' lived at Earlstone at one time and I believe the Eyres once owned the place. In the last half of the 18th century Rear Admiral John Ambrose was Lord of the Manor of Earlstone, and lived at the old house."

² For particulars see *Moyles Court and Dame Alicia Lisle*, by F. Fane, Hants F.C. Papers, Vol. I, p. 93.

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JACOBÆAN MANTELPIECE, EARLSTONE MANOR HOUSE, BURGHCLERE.

The Beconshaws were found freely fighting for the Crown in the reign of Charles I., but notwithstanding this, Earlstone, owing to its seclusion and defensive works, was one of the spots fixed upon by the Parliamentary leaders for a military outpost so soon as they had obtained a footing in this part of the country, for the purpose of "taking in" Basing, Donnington Castle, and other royalist parts still occupied for the King. In December, 1645, Major Stuart, who commanded a strong body of horse for the Parliament, quartered at Kingsclere, in order to secure his position, erected "turnpikes,"¹ or temporary barricades, at all the entrances to the principal streets, and blocked up all the avenues of approach, at the same time posting strong detachments of the Kentish regiment at Earlstone to co-operate as might be required. Sir John Boys, the hero of Donnington Castle, gets information as to the quarters of the enemy's horse at Kingsclere, and finding it impossible to deal with Stuart, resolves to attempt some design upon his countrymen—the Kentish regiment. Not having a sufficient body of horse to beat up their quarters, Boys sends 100 foot from the Castle, who passing hedge and ditch in the dead of night, fell unsuspectingly upon the Kentish men's quarters at Earlstone. After putting many of the surprised garrison to the sword, the Castellians, besides prisoners, brought away about 80 horses, arms, and good pillage. Stuart was, naturally, furious at what he considered an act of cowardice on the part of the Kentish men and the dishonour it entailed on the garrison, which he partly attributed to information given by the neighbouring Royalist yeomen, in whose houses they were quartered, who lost no opportunity of giving Boys every notice of their movements. These bold and frequent beating up of quarters in which the Kentish regiment lost over 200 horses, led to reprisals, and in a skirmish Colonel Smith, one of the most dashing of the Castellian leaders, was shot by Major Stuart. To avenge Smith's death a party of the Castellians surprised Stuart as he was sitting by the side of his intended bride at a Christmas supper party, at Greenham manor-house, and refusing to take quarter, he was instantly

¹ These "turnpikes" consisted of a cross of two bars armed with pikes at the top, and turning upon a pin, fixed to prevent cavalry from entering—hence our more modern name of turnpike.

shot dead on the spot. Both Cavalier and Roundhead colonels were buried side by side in the chancel of Newbury Church. And here we may mention that the Beconshaws of Earlstone were connected by marriage with the Mundy's, of Newbury, a Wiltshire family, one of whom, John Mundy, an Attorney, was Mayor of the borough in 1664.

There is a farm at Earlstone called "Pilgrims Farm," which most probably derived its name from being on the line of an ancient trackway, a Pilgrims way leading to Winchester.

Edward Lisle, of Crux Easton, to whom we have previously referred, as nephew to the historic Alice Lisle, née Beconshaw, of Moyles Court, cousin to the Beconshaws of Earlstone, died in 1722. He was the author of an interesting work, abounding with local information, entitled "Observations on Agriculture," and is said to have had twenty children. Nine of his daughters constructed here a curious grotto, celebrated in the following lines by Pope, who frequently visited the family at Crux Easton:—

" Here shunning idleness at once and praise,
This radiant pile nine rural sisters raise ;
The glittering emblem of each spotless dame :—
Pure as her soul, and shining as her fame :—
Beauty which nature only can impart,
And such a polish as disgraces art ;
But fate dispos'd them in this humble sort,
And hid in deserts what would charm a court."

The "radiant pile has long since disappeared, but its site is still perpetuated in the name of "Grotto Copse." Margaret, the youngest of the nine sisters, possessed great talents for painting; three of her pieces in crayons are preserved at Highclere Castle, two of them are copies of ancient portraits of Sir Richard and Lady Kingsmill, admirably executed. On the trees of the grove surrounding the grotto, she painted the portraits of several of her friends, in a manner which produced a singular effect, as they appeared to form part of the trees themselves.

The view of Earlstone House at the head of this paper is from a sketch by Miss G. D. Surrey, and the illustrations of the chimney piece are from detailed drawings by Mr. Malcolm Watson of Newbury, to both these contributors we are greatly indebted and tender our best thanks.

PEDIGREE OF BECONSHAW, OF EARLSTONE
AND MOYLES COURT.

