

## Country Life visit Kildwick Hall (1911)

Just over a century ago, the up-market magazine Country Life visited Kildwick Hall which was then the home of the MP for Keighley Sir John Brigg.

The Local History Group has recently been loaned a photocopy of the article which appeared in the Country Life edition of January 1911, which is reproduced in its entirety on the following pages.

This article is of some historic significance as it was used as evidence when Kildwick Hall and its environs were given listed building status in 1954.

**Note:** John Brigg had been MP for Keighley since 1895 and was a central figure in the story of the Kildwick typhoid epidemic of 1898-1899. He died on September 30<sup>th</sup> 1911.



**K**ILDWICK HALL lies in the same moorland district of Yorkshire that the Brontë sisters have made so well known to us by their lives and their writings. They lived at Haworth Parsonage, a little south of that growing industrial centre, the town of Keighley, to the north of which Kildwick lies. The nine miles that intervene was a long distance for so stay-at-home a family as the Brontës, but the Hall and its owner must have been well known to Charlotte, since she took her *nom de plume* from there. Kildwick Hall is the old home of the Currer family, and was owned by a Miss Currer, when Charlotte Brontë, wanting, as she tells us, to find a pseudonym that might pass for that of a man without using a definitely male Christian name, assumed authorship as Currer Bell. Her reasons for this particular choice she does not tell; but it should be noticed that Currers mated with Hawthorns and that the Hawthorn arms are impaled by those of Currer over the entrance door of the house. That house—as originally planned, and as it remains with certain additions and modifications—has a close likeness to the general type of the halls of the small Yorkshire moorland squires that the sisters knew and described, as Emily Brontë did the one she named "Wuthering Heights." Though Kildwick is on a hillside, it was certainly not in her mind when she wrote her book, yet the description she gives of Heathcliff's house answers for that of the Currers: "One step brought us into the family sitting-room without any introductory lobby or passage: they

call it here 'the house' pre-eminently." Thus the hall at Kildwick, which is here illustrated, opens straight from the south porch, and was the main room of the house. It preserves its massive rafter ceiling like that which the authoress describes as having "never been underdrawn; its entire anatomy lay bare to an inquiring eye." It is not in this room, however, that we find a "frame of wood laden with oatcakes and clusters of legs of beef, mutton and ham." At Kildwick that hangs in the kitchen, where also we find the "ranks of immense pewter dishes interspersed with jugs and tankards, towering row after row on a vast oak dresser, to the very roof."

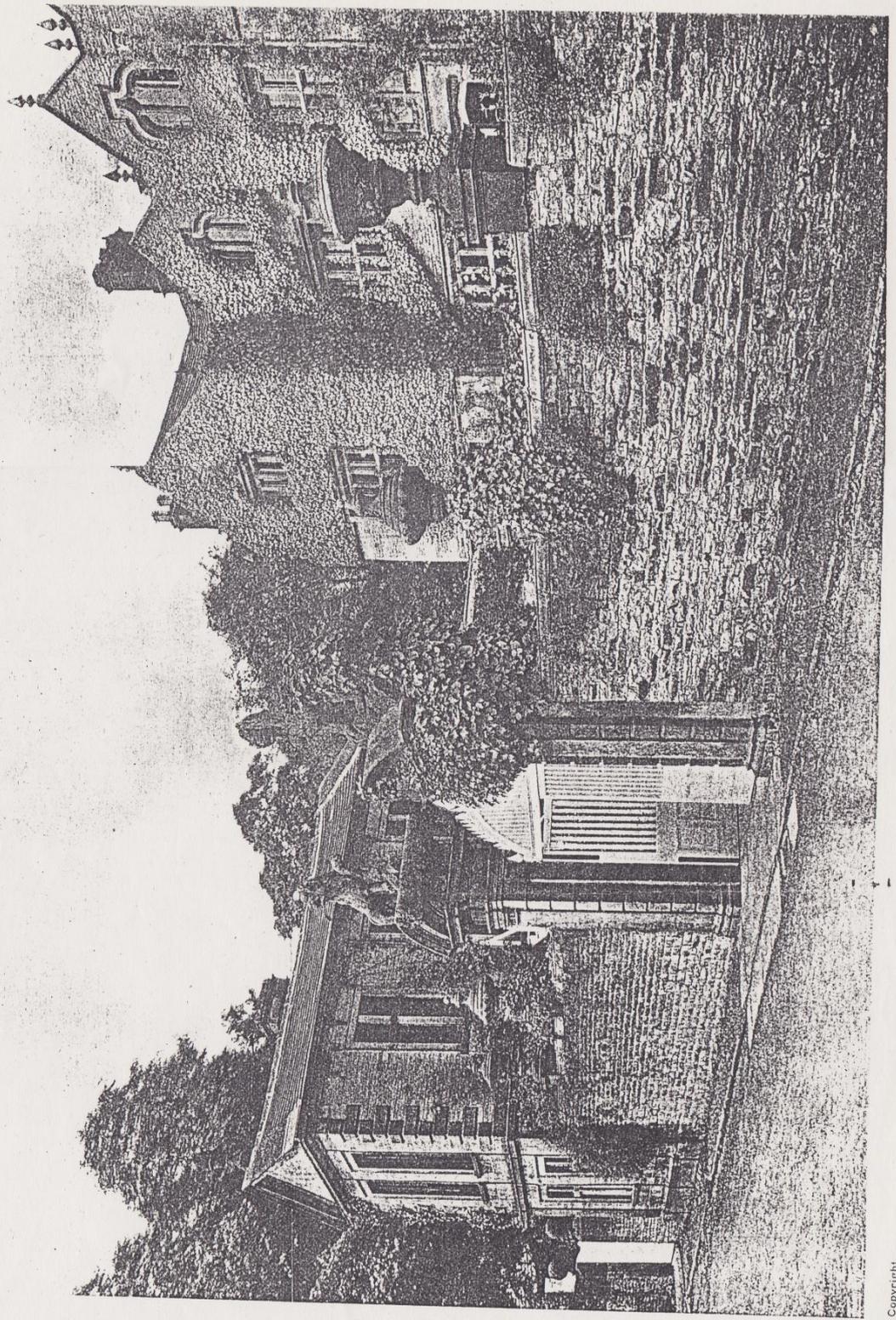
Perhaps at one time the "house" at Kildwick presented in some measure the utilitarian domesticity, the mixture of living-room and kitchen, described by Emily Brontë. Certainly the accommodation was not originally large; but, at the same time, the character of its owners and its position close to a large and thriving village must have given to it a greater tone of civilisation than was possessed by some of the more remote moorland homes that the Brontës came across, and of which Mrs. Gaskell in her "Life of Charlotte Brontë" gives a striking example. A friend of hers, liking the appearance of a well-looking old house belonging to a man of some eight hundred a year, was going up to inspect it, when the native he was walking with declared, "Yo'd better not; he'd threap yo' down th' loan. He's let fly at some folks' legs and let shot lodge in 'em afore now, for going too near to his house."



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THE JACOBAN AND PALLADIAN GARDEN-HOUSES.

"COUNTRY LIFE."



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A JACOBÆAN HOUSE AND A PILLADIAN GARDEN.

"COUNTRY LIFE."

The Domesday Surveyors found that "Childewic" was, like the whole of the Honour of Skipton, *terra regis*, and with that great domain it soon after passed into the hands of Robert de Romillé. His daughter and heiress, Cecilia, gave the manor to the religious house which she founded, and which shortly settled at Bolton. The evidence of the good landlordism of the Bolton canons long survived in the form of a bridge that spanned the river Aire at Kildwick, and which they had built

belongs to the lords of the manor, and contains monuments of the Currers and a window displaying their arms and those of their connections, including those of Henry Curre and his wife, Anne Wade. He died in 1568, some ten years after he had acquired the manor, which had been more than once bought and sold since it had ceased to be a possession of the canons of Bolton, but has ever since passed by inheritance, though the blood of the Currers does not flow in the present owner's veins.

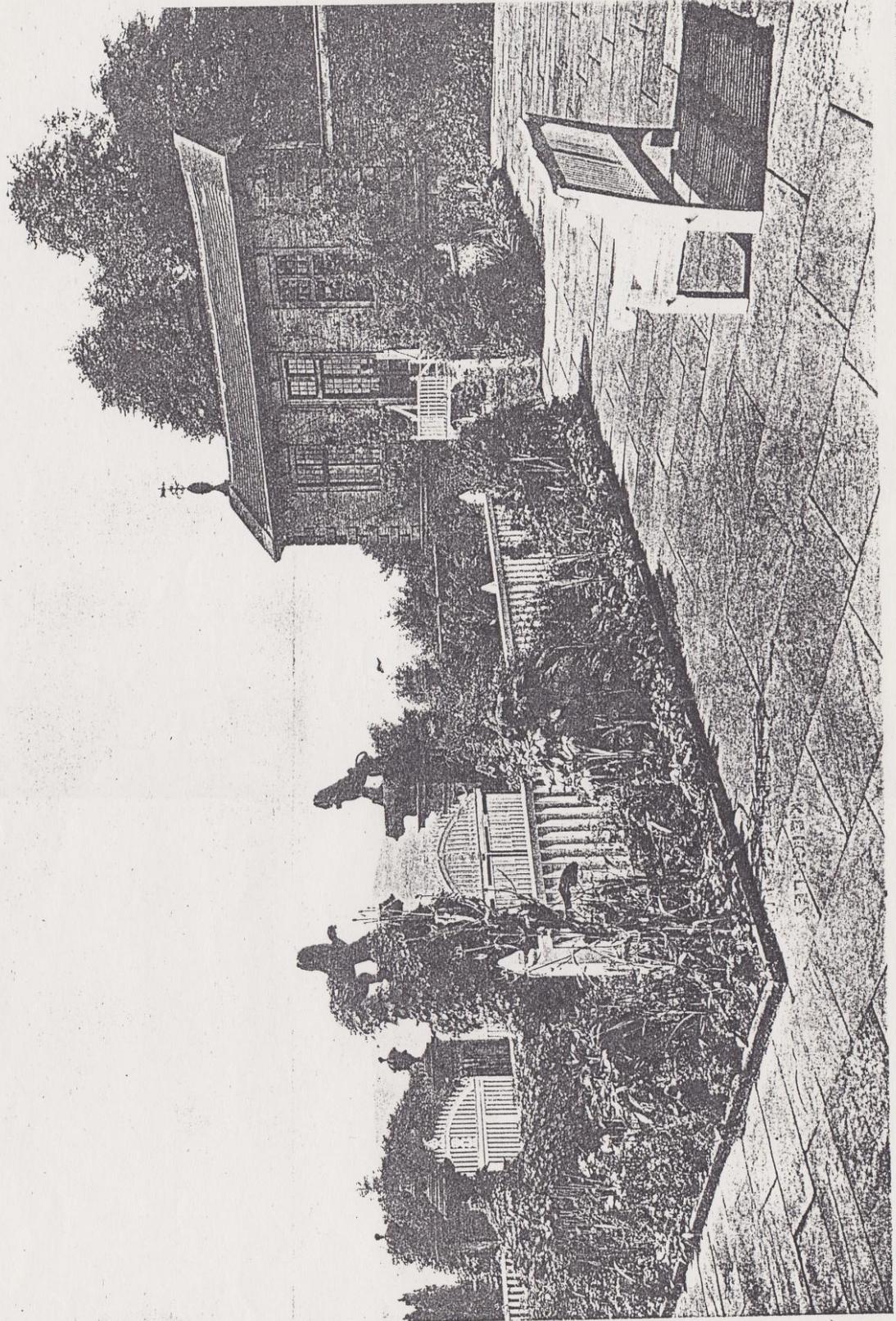


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ENTRANCE FRONT FROM THE DOOR OF THE "JUSTICE ROOM." "COUNTRY LIFE."

in the reign of Edward II. Now, unfortunately, it has been widened and its ancient appearance marred. It was probably also the canons who, shortly before their property was torn from them, almost entirely rebuilt the nave of the church which Whitaker, in his "History of Craven," tells us dates from the time of Henry VIII., and has a choir "extended to an unusual length, from which circumstance it has acquired with the vulgar name of the Lang Kirk in Craven." Its north chancel aisle

Henry Curre seems to have belonged to the parish before he owned the manor, for the family pedigree starts with his father and calls him "of Kildwick." Such history as may appertain to this family is purely local, and interests us only in so far as it teaches us anything of the date and origin of the delightful house and garden that have come down to us in such excellent condition. Of their precise origin it is difficult to say anything very definite. Even the vast and ponderous Whitaker's

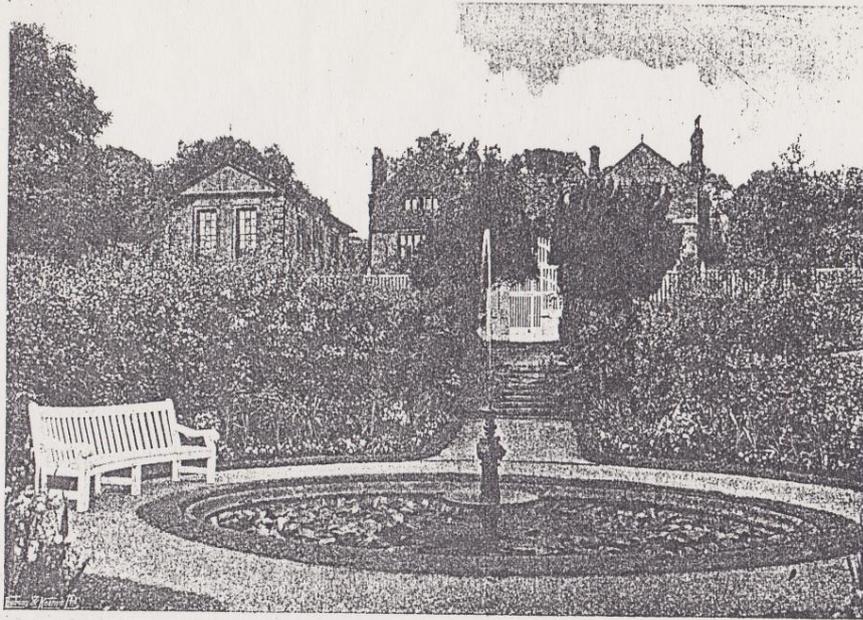


THE PAVED TERRACE BEFORE THE SOUTH PORCH.

"COUNTRY LIFE."

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"Craven," edited by Mr. A. W. Morant in 1878, adds nothing to the one short sentence with which the author dismissed the subject when he first published his book a hundred years ago: "The manor-house, a respectable stone building, perhaps a century and a half old, stands high above the church, with a very steep descent in front, but is sheltered by thriving plantations." The house was placed on the bank to the north of the public way and a few steps from the road led to the porch. The



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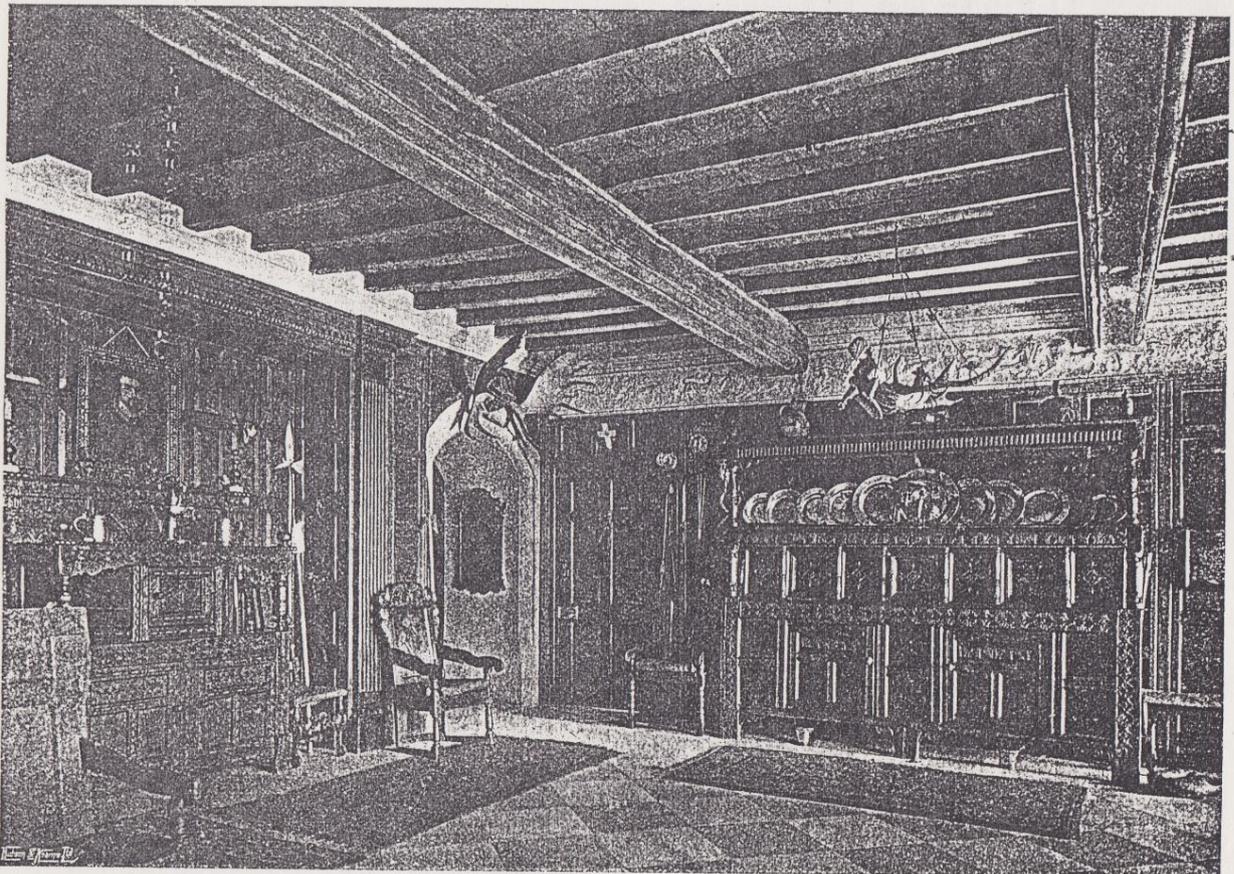
LILY POOL IN LOWER GARDEN.

"COUNTRY LIFE."

continual rise of the ground and the fine woods that cover it not only protect the house from northern blasts, but greatly add to the general amenity and appearance of the whole composition. As regards the building and the garden architecture, we find that succeeding generations have worked in two distinct styles. The house clearly falls under the category of Jacobean, while the terracing, the detached pavilion, the gateposts and vases are typical of the garden-work that was done in England when William III. was King. There is much in the great solidity of the deeply-recessed window-frames and in the section of the mullioning that calls to mind houses built in the early days

of Elizabeth, when Henry Curre became lord of the manor. But the conservatism of out-of-the-way rural districts led sons to follow in the footsteps of their fathers, so that the south front as it is to-day may well date from the seventeenth century. We can, however, hardly suppose it to have been new-built at the time when the coat of arms was carved in the panel above the door. They are those of Hugh Curre, impaling those of his wife, Anne Harworth. He succeeded his father at Kildwick

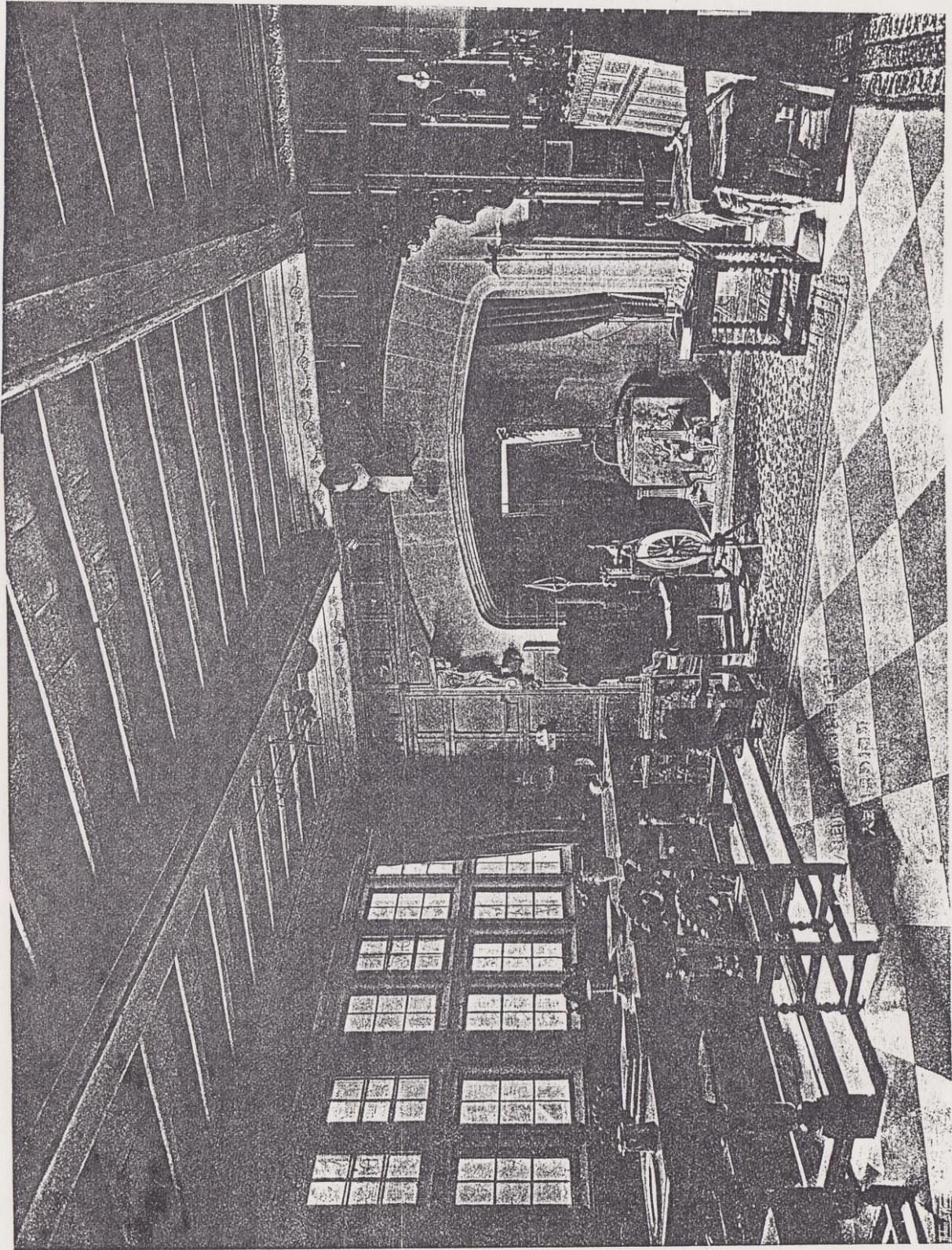
in 1653, and he died and was buried there in 1690. He again set his mark on the great stone arch of the kitchen fireplace, whereon are carved the initials "H. C." and the date 1673, as the illustration discloses. At that date Palladianism had triumphed in England, and it might even be supposed that Hugh Curre was the author of the gardens and the detached pavilion. They, however, belong to the next generation, for we read on the tombstone of his son, Henry Curre, who died in 1723: "He was a great proficient in the study of the law; but, allured by the charms of a private life, retired to the place of his birth, where he chused rather to employ the skill he had



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THE WEST END OF THE HALL.

"COUNTRY LIFE."



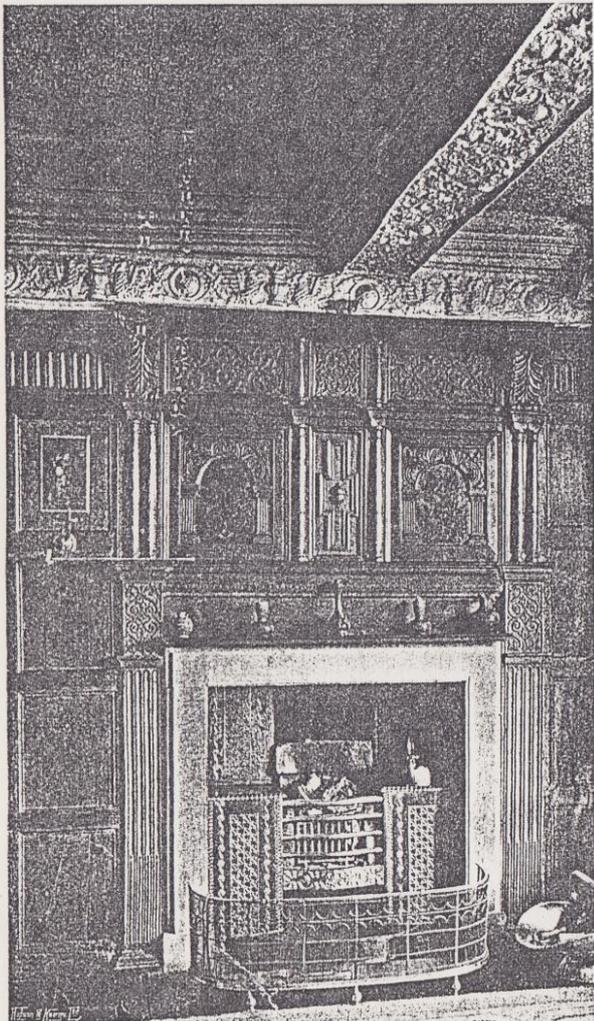
"COUNTRY LIFE."

THE EAST END OF THE HALL.

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acquired therein to the benefit of his country, in the dispensation of Justice of the Bench, than to the improvement of his own fortune, in attendance at the Bar." The Palladian pavilion, though a Hepplewhite billiard-table shows the use to which it is now put, is still known as the "justice room," and is, no doubt, the place erected by Henry Currer "to the benefit of his country," as it is to be hoped the law-abiding section of his neighbours agreed. The rapid slope from the house to the road makes this building of two-storeyed height at its south end, which abuts on the road, and is lineable with the boundary wall on which fine stone vases are set, and which is pierced with a gateway flanked by very elaborate and ambitious gate-piers. Their capitals support the sections of a broken pediment, on which stand lions, passant gardant. The sculptor took some little licence with heraldry, no doubt thinking the general composition was improved by the lions' heads being turned towards the approaching visitor, although the Currer lion looks straight ahead.

Henry Currer, the lawyer, after the death of his first wife in 1697, married a widow of means, and this may have been the origin of the Palladian additions and alterations at Kildwick. They were not limited to the garden area, but appear here and there inside, consorting by no means uncomfortably with the older and more dominant Jacobean style. In the hall the latter has full sway, and an appearance of admirable completeness is given to the room by the many excellent and well-chosen examples of oak furniture placed here by Sir John Brigg. The three-storeyed Court cupboard at the west end of the room, if modest as an example of carving, is remarkable for its great size—it is nearly nine feet across and over seven feet high—and for its fine tone and condition. It shines at every point, but that is the result of elbow-grease and not of varnish. It is perfect in all details, including the delightful old iron drop handles to its upper line of cupboard doors. It possesses also a sentimental interest, for it came from the house which served as the model for Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights," and may, indeed, be the very piece she describes as the



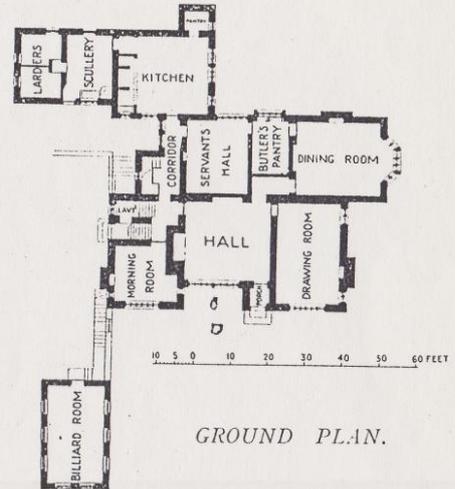
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IN AN UPSTAIRS ROOM.

"C.L."

pewter-bearing dresser. The smaller piece is very good, but less unusual, and so is the long table with carved rail that stands in front of the long eight-light window. The collection of oak chairs, both with and without arms, is typical of Yorkshire, not the least interesting being that made for a child. It is now very low, having, no doubt, lost the long legs usual in such pieces, but the rest is quite untouched, and is almost a fac-simile on a small scale of the large armchair that stands close by on the left-hand side of the fire arch. Facing them is a settle, which may certainly be rightly described as in the full Jacobean manner, though carved on it, with the initials "I. A. A.," is the date 1691. If that was the date of its manufacture, it proves how late the Jacobean traditions lingered among the local furniture makers, as it may also have done with the stone-masons, so that there would be nothing surprising in the discovery that Hugh Kildwick built, or at least re-edified, the house after he came into possession in 1653, and that his arms are an integral portion of the structure. It would merely mean that the æsthetic ideas prevalent in his youth were never driven out by those later developments, of which his son was an exponent, when it came to his turn to deal with the place.

To the son's time belongs the get-up of the drawing-room, where he left the old mullioned windows, and thus preserved the external congruity of the house while introducing new interior fittings, including a simple but very dignified marble mantel-piece. Furniture of the same style gives to the room a delightful sense of decorative unity. At that date also was contrived a very pretty little subsidiary staircase next the kitchen. It is of oak with balusters of good model. The older or main stairway lies west of the hall and is of stone built round a solid oblong caisse, so that it is, in principle, merely a departure from the newel form of mediæval times. The charming plaster-work panels of its ceiling will belong to the time of its erection. They are continued along the bedroom corridor, which has a great oak beam, with early moulding, as its cornice, while, on the other hand, the doorways to the bed-chambers have the large roll moulding of William III.'s time. Inside more than one of the bed-chambers the Jacobean character is fully preserved. Sir John's room, no doubt, was originally an upstairs parlour, and has oak wainscoting, with long, hollow, fluted panels as a cornice. The mantel-piece is a modest but well-designed example of early seventeenth century character. The upper panels are of low relief, geometrical carving. Of those below, the narrow one in the middle has a bit of split balustrade work as its chief ornamentation; but the larger ones on each side have carved arcades, framing panels of simple floral inlay, which, though not part of the original design, consort most happily with the general composition. The same plasterer who wrought on the stairs may have been answerable for the dragon frieze in this room, and also for the singularly rich and well-designed scrollwork that occupies the soffit of the great moulded beam that bisects the ceiling. It is a pity that the delightful effect of this original ornamentation should not have a right background of plain plaster-work, but that the ceiling should be papered with some sort of a modern composition of raised patterning. The old character of Kildwick is so charmingly maintained, and its merits so fully felt and appreciated, that anything not fully in character with it jars at once. It is, therefore, very much to be hoped that the reglazing of the windows may some day be taken in hand. Some last century "improver" filled most of them with plate-glass, and an attempt has been made to modify the deplorable effect by painting black lines on the glass to imitate the leading that is gone. What that was like we find in the picturesque garden-house that occupies the western end of the wall that borders the road. It has somewhat a motley appearance; the main outlines, the gable coping and finials and the



GROUND PLAN.

three-light windows, with their original glazing, being exactly similar to the south front of the house. But at the back is a little cusped window, while a finial, with a semblance of Gothic crocketing, rises up in the centre of the roof. Inside there is a coved plaster ceiling arranged in panels, of which the frames are enriched with delicate but somewhat late plaster ornament. The whole thing is very typical of what we find at Kildwick. Several generations of men of taste have wrought here in a quite small and modest but thoughtful and finished manner. It is a little place by the roadside, yet is clearly the home of a succession of well-to-do and cultured men. When Henry Curren, smitten with the ampler gardening views of his age, felt that he must lay out formal grounds on a considerable scale, he had to stretch his design across the road. His ambitious heraldic gate-piers are, therefore, faced by another pair somewhat simpler, but yet of strongly marked architectural character, and topped by well-carved stone vases. Through them we reach a lower garden, arranged on several levels, with flights of steps descending from terrace walk to garden plat. A circular fountain basin is a central object, and the flower effect is continued round it, but most of the space is dedicated to vegetables. As seen from the south porch, the grouping of the two sections of the garden, rich in architectural objects and floral display, is very delightful. It forms, moreover, a delightful foreground to the wide sweep of the distant moorland, and blots out the valley, of which the beauty has certainly been much marred by recent industrial progress.

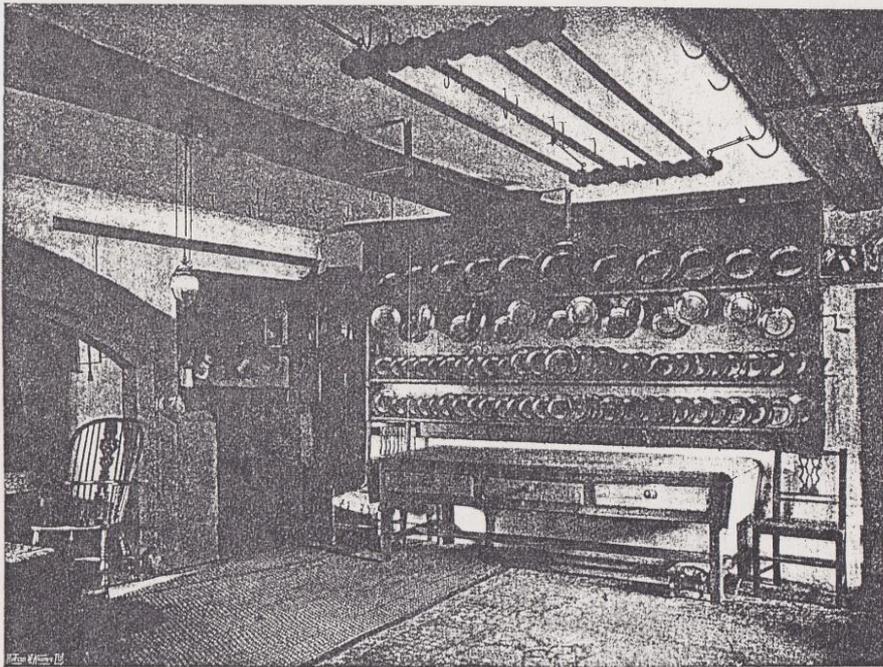
The male line of Curren did not continue very long after the death of Henry, the lawyer, in 1722. His grandson, another Henry, married and died in the same year 1756, and the estates passed to his sister, Sarah Curren, a spinster, who made Bath her residence, and did not long survive him. John Richardson, a cousin, was the first inheritor appointed by her will. He took the name of Curren and lived at Kildwick, a rain-water-head marking by its date his care of his inheritance. When he died childless in June, 1784, a parson nephew, Henry Richardson, had just time to enter into possession and assume the name of Curren before he, too, was laid in his grave. Some months later a daughter was born to his widow, and was the Miss Curren that owned Kildwick when Whitaker wrote his history, and was still alive when the Brontës appeared as authoresses. She, however, followed the example of the relative through whose will the place had come to her, and died a spinster in 1856. Her mother had taken Mr. Mathew Wilson as her second husband, and it is their descendant, Colonel Wharton Wilson, D.S.O., who is the present lord of the manor. This devolution of the estate is very charmingly suggested on the modern plaster frieze running round the hall, where the Curren lions and the Wilson wolves hold up cartouches, which bear alternately the initials C. & W. The house, however, has long been let to Sir John Brigg, whose family is so well known in the industrial history of this part of Yorkshire. Among the many old-time objects which he has brought together in the hall is a little early hand comb, eight inches by fifteen inches, made of oak and stamped "J. B. & Co." It is a sort of link between the old days of cottage spinning and weaving, such as this district knew in the days when Currens lived at Kildwick, and of the age of mechanical invention that has multiplied and cheapened production, but has introduced an organisation of labour and an alteration in the general appearance of the country by no means in harmony with the principles of ethics and æsthetics that ruled when the Currens built their

Hall. It is fortunate indeed that that typical old home remains to remind us convincingly and vividly of old days and old ways. The sympathetic treatment it has received from both owner and tenant deserves all praise. T.

## WILD COUNTRY LIFE.

THE NEW COALTIT.

THE discovery of a new coaltit (illustrated in COUNTRY LIFE last week) in the pine woods of County Sligo is quite an interesting event in the history of British birds. So much, indeed, have these islands been ransacked during the last three hundred years, and especially in the last fifty, that it speaks much for the energy and research of Mr. Ingram to have thus brought to light a new species. We have now two British coaltits, *Parus ater*, the common species, and *Parus hibernicus*, the Irish tit, or, more properly, titmouse, the name bestowed on this fresh discovery by the authorities at the British Museum. The chief distinction between the new Irish tit and the coaltit lies in the fact that in those portions of the head and neck plumage of the latter species which are pure white, in the Irish tit they are clear sulphur yellow. These portions are the cheeks and a spot on the hinder part of the neck. This clear distinction is, I understand, not confined to one or two specimens; all the supposed coaltits found by Mr. Ingram in the woods of Sligo, where he made his discovery, bear the same characteristics. It now remains to be seen whether these Sligo tits are the sole representatives in the British islands of the new species, or whether more specimens may not be discovered in other parts of the same island. Coaltits are abundant in the pine forests of Scotland. It is possible that the Irish tit may be found in some of these regions also. It may be hoped that the smart and lively coaltit, always a handsome and most cheerful ornament of the woods which he inhabits, may not suffer unduly in this process of discovery.



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THE KITCHEN.

"COUNTRY LIFE."

### DIFFERENCES IN THE COALTITS.

Observers such as Messrs. Bowdler Sharpe and Dresser have already separated our British form of coaltit from the Continental race, chiefly for the reason that in our representative the back is olive brown, while in the Continental race it is slate grey. But, as the late Mr. Howard Saunders has pointed out, although the differences in tint are often recognisable, there are intergradations, which are noticeable even in specimens from Scottish forests. These and examples from other localities may be foreign immigrants, but coaltits are not familiar as migratory birds to the keepers of lightships and lighthouses. Even at the famous Heligoland Lighthouse they have been seldom noticed. The coaltit, although well known in England, Wales and Ireland, is most plentiful in Scotland, where the extensive pine woods favour its habits. It is a lively and amusing bird, and its perky and even impudent ways remind one much of its cousin the blue tit, the familiar "tomtit" of schoolboys and country-folk. The coaltit, by the way, never seems to have acquired the nicknames bestowed upon the blue tit, which is or has been known in various parts of the country as tomtit, blue cap, blue bonnet, blue whaup, nun, nickwall and Billy-biter.

### FOREIGN COALTITS.

On the Continent the grey-backed race of coaltit is well known as a resident species in the central and southern parts of Europe. It is found as far North as the 65th parallel, but a partial Southern migration takes place in winter. In Algeria a form known to naturalists as *Parus ledouxi* is found; this race is distinguished by yellow cheeks, neck spot and under parts. No doubt our British Museum authorities have clearly established the differences between this race and our new Irish tit. Dr. F. H. Guillemard discovered in the mountains of Cyprus some twenty-three years back a form of coaltit which has been named *P. cypricus*, in which the hue of the back is browner than in our species, the white neck patch is very faint and the black colouring on the throat is somewhat more noticeable. In the Caucasus yet another form has been established, intermediate between the Continental and our own race. Coaltits are found varying in colour, crests and other details eastward through Asia as far as Japan.

### THE MARSHITIT.

Casual observers occasionally mistake the marshtit for the coaltit, but so long ago as 1676 the naturalist Willoughby pointed out the distinctions between these species. In the adult marshtit the upper part of the head and the nape are glossy black, the cheeks dull white—buff on the sides of the neck—the back olive brown, rump brownish olive, showing more of the former colour, quills and tail ash brown, with paler outer margins. The chin and throat are