

Shallcross and Yeardsley Halls.

By ERNEST GUNSON.

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I.

SHALLCROSS, WHALEY BRIDGE.

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FROM the old coach road through Taxal Valley, leading from Buxton to Manchester, and probably a relic of Roman days, there branches a by-lane which was originally a pack-horse way to the ancient Shallcross Hall. This would seem to have faced the approach on a site that had been levelled by terracing the sloping ground, thus allowing the road to lead in a straight line to the door of the hall. On this site now stands an eighteenth century barn, but that it was originally occupied when the road was made is proved by the fact that the road turns abruptly to the left and again to the right to avoid and pass round the hall, before it is continued down the hillside to the River Goyt, where there was a ford which is still usable to-day for carts, and where stepping-stones, originally, no doubt, allowed foot passengers to cross dryshod. Near the ford is still to be seen clearly defined a portion of the old pack-horse road, cut out of the solid rock, but the remainder of the road has been widened for modern purposes and its character changed.

From the ford the road ascends directly to Taxal Church, and there seems to be little doubt that it was specially made to allow the inhabitants of Shallcross Hall to attend the church, of which there now only remains the tower, which dates back to A.D. 1200, the nave and chancel having been rebuilt in the last century.

* These notes represent some of the many pleasant hours Mr. Andrew and I have spent in visiting the old halls of this and other counties.



SHALLCROSS HALL. THE NORTH FRONT.

A. Victor Haslam.



SHALLCROSS HALL. THE SOUTH FRONT.

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The site of the original hall, as previously mentioned, is now covered by what may be styled the uninteresting wing of the farm buildings. This hall would be of the half-timbered type, common enough at that time, and of which, fortunately, many examples still remain to us, especially in Cheshire.

If we imagine a long, low building of black oak beneath a high pitched and tiled roof, open within to the rafters in the centre for the great hall, with offshoots at either end for the owners' living rooms and for the kitchens respectively, and in addition, probably a chapel, a gatehouse and a curtilage wall, we have in mind something of what mediæval Shallcross would be. Comparing this with the site we find a raised bank for the foundations of the hall itself, allowing for the main approach from the old road to lead through a mound, which perhaps represents the gatehouse, straight to the door of the inner hall, passing on the right the chapel which probably stood where the Elizabethan stables now are, for there is just sufficient in the stones of their foundation to raise a suspicion of such a building. Below the site are remains of what was once no doubt a small fish-pond, and the fences still indicate the probable line of the curtilage wall.

As the requirements of the times altered, it became necessary to build more commodious premises, and therefore towards the end of the sixteenth century a new hall was built in the Elizabethan style, on the rising ground to the right of the old hall. This hall, of which evidences remain to us in certain materials which, as we shall see, have been used again in the construction of its successor, has otherwise disappeared save that the position of the walls are still indicated, as if upon a rough ground plan, by trenches in the soil showing where the old stones had been dug up. Judging by the appearance and size of the old foundation lines, it was evidently a building very similar in design to Snitterton Hall, near Matlock, but slightly earlier, being in the form of the letter E, minus the centre arm.

The terrace, which was necessary by reason of the sloping ground, is still there, supported by the original wall, and the views commanded from this comprise the whole of the Whaley

Bridge valley. The site is at right angles to that of its mediæval predecessor, for in accordance with the custom mentioned by Mr. Andrew in his paper on Snitterton Hall, the old house was usually retained intact for the use of the family until the new was ready, thus necessitating a fresh site for every rebuilding. In this instance the site selected was to the left of the road of approach, and in the peaceful days of Queen Bess the front probably faced it without any other protection than a terrace and low balustraded wall.

A notable feature of the old halls is that they were always placed where a supply of fresh water could be carried, practically, through the kitchen. Here the stream from the spring passes the foundations of both the first and second halls, and in the case of the first hall was carried into the fish-pond mentioned above. The stable and farm buildings of the second hall were built on the lower ground on the opposite side of the road, which would then have been vacated by the disuse of the chapel after the Reformation. These still exist, though much modified, and we can well conceive what their quality must have been when they were first built at the end of the sixteenth century. They are of stone, and the front showed four five-light windows on the ground floor with a door in the centre, and on either side of it, on the upper floor, a five-light window surmounted by a gable. The end gables of the building itself had moulded copings finished off by moulded footstones.

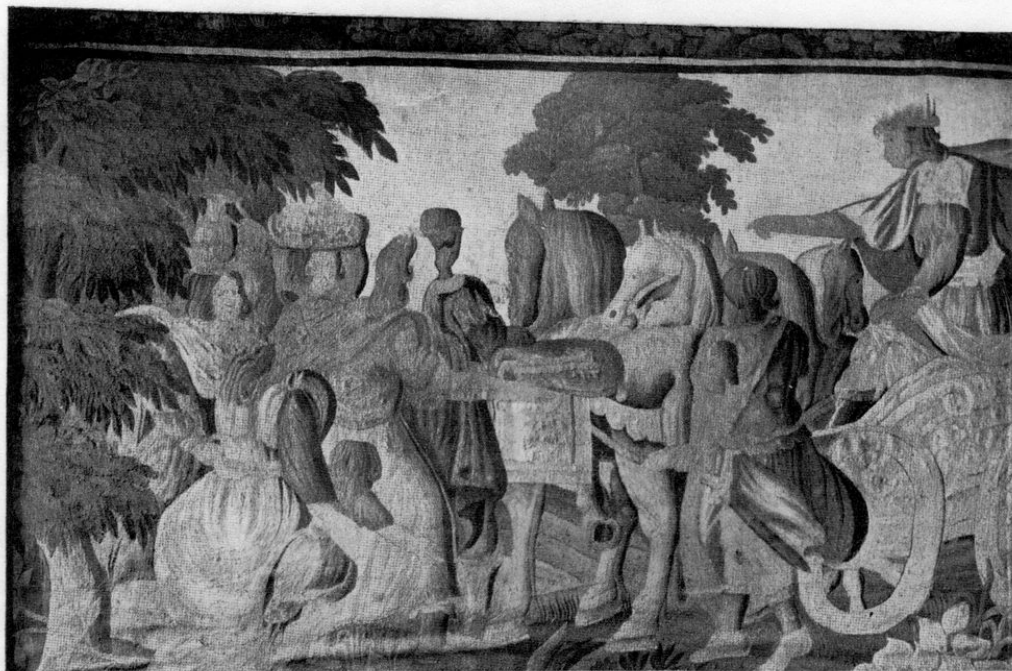
This building has been much altered from time to time, the upper windows have been removed, only portions of their sills being left to remind one of their existence, and the roof is now plain; but enough remains to enable us to picture the appearance of the whole when it left the hands of the builders some three centuries ago. The inside of the stables, however, except for the loss of the upper windows, which no doubt gave light to the dormitories for the stable men, is much in the same condition, save for age, as originally designed. A set of stables on these lines, with a dormitory, or house part, attached, although of smaller and plainer proportions and of later date, can still be seen at Mellor Hall, in this county.

The fittings throughout are of massive oak, and the beams are moulded and stopped. Each stall for the horses was entered through an oak archway, upon moulded pillars, and so solid and massive is the workmanship that it looks likely to last a century or two longer. The general design of this is so effective and unusual in stable fittings that at the first glance it suggested the arcading of a hall-screen.

Although only the foundations of the contemporary hall are left, one may conclude from the evidence of its adjuncts that it must have been of proportionate quality, and perhaps equal to any of its kind and size in the county.

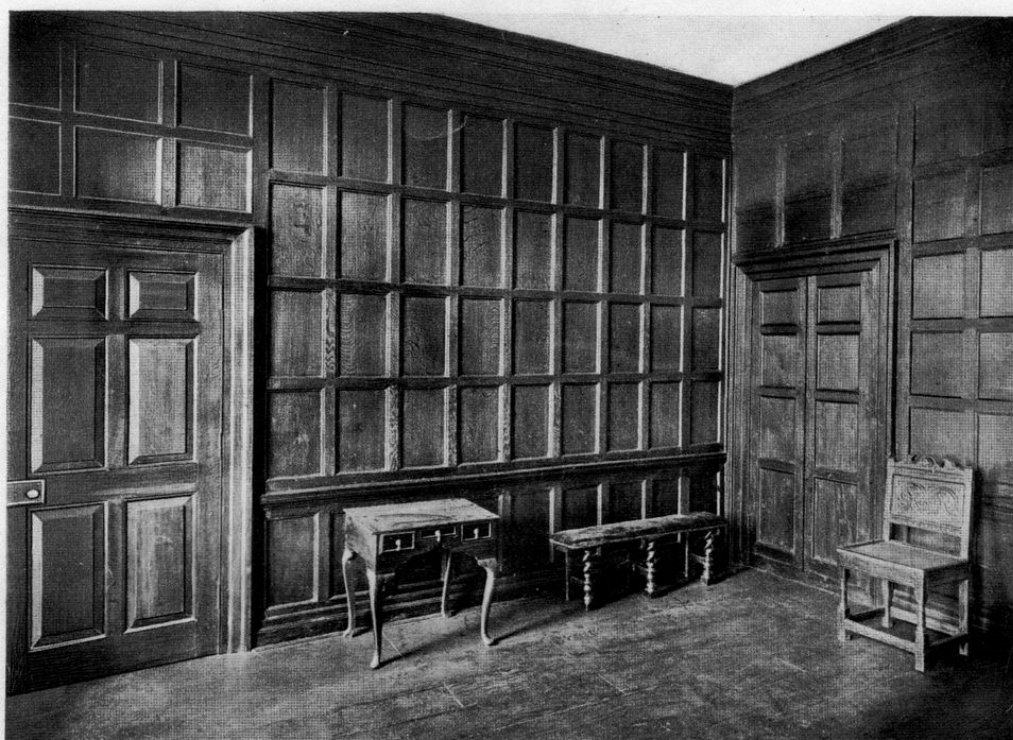
In the beginning of the eighteenth century the requirements of the owners of Shallcross again necessitated, or, at least, it was thought that they did, the erection of the third hall, which stands to-day in a commanding though more exposed position on the ridge of the hill above, but a little to the east of the earlier halls.

The existing hall, which is now a summer residence of the owner of Shallcross Manor, Col. E. Cotton-Jodrell, C.B., is an imposing stone building in the Early Georgian style of architecture, and typical of the best of its period. The well-known Ditchley House in Oxfordshire, the seat of Lord Dillon, though more extensive than Shallcross, is singularly like it in design. Indeed, except that Ditchley has a flat roof, which is perhaps a modernization, a photograph of the west front of Ditchley would do almost equally well for the south front of Shallcross; even the central projection, the door, and the number and position of the windows correspond, and the wall plan, details of cornice and architecture are all identical. It is true that on a close inspection there are differences in some minor respects, such as the detail ornamentation of the door, which, however, closely resembles that to the north front of Shallcross. Ditchley is considered one of the finest works of its architect, the famous James Gibbs. He was born in 1682, and died in 1754, but his best results were in the middle period. Ditchley was commenced about 1720, and completed in 1722. This curious similarity in style between the two houses made



SHALLCROSS HALL. THE TAPESTRY.

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SHALLCROSS HALL. THE PANELED DINING ROOM.

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it worth while to refer to the biography of Gibbs to see whether he could possibly have been so far away from London, the centre of his labours, at this period of his life as to design a hall in Derbyshire. It was therefore pleasant to find that in 1723 he came to Derby to rebuild the large church of Allhallows, save the fifteenth century tower, completing the work in 1725. Therefore, as he came into Derbyshire fresh from finishing Ditchley, we may almost assume that the owner of Shallcross seized the opportunity of securing the services of so famous an architect of the times. Gibbs, when men thought it a far journey from Oxford to the Peak, would have little hesitation in re-using his plans and detailed drawings for a second house so far away. Moreover, the Shallcross of that day had been Sheriff, and was a Justice of the Peace; as such he would attend the Grand Juries at Derby, which, as Mr. Bowles told us in our previous volume, were summoned twice a year. Thus he would naturally be brought in contact with the famous architect between 1723 and 1725. The explanation of this curious similarity therefore seems to be nearly complete.

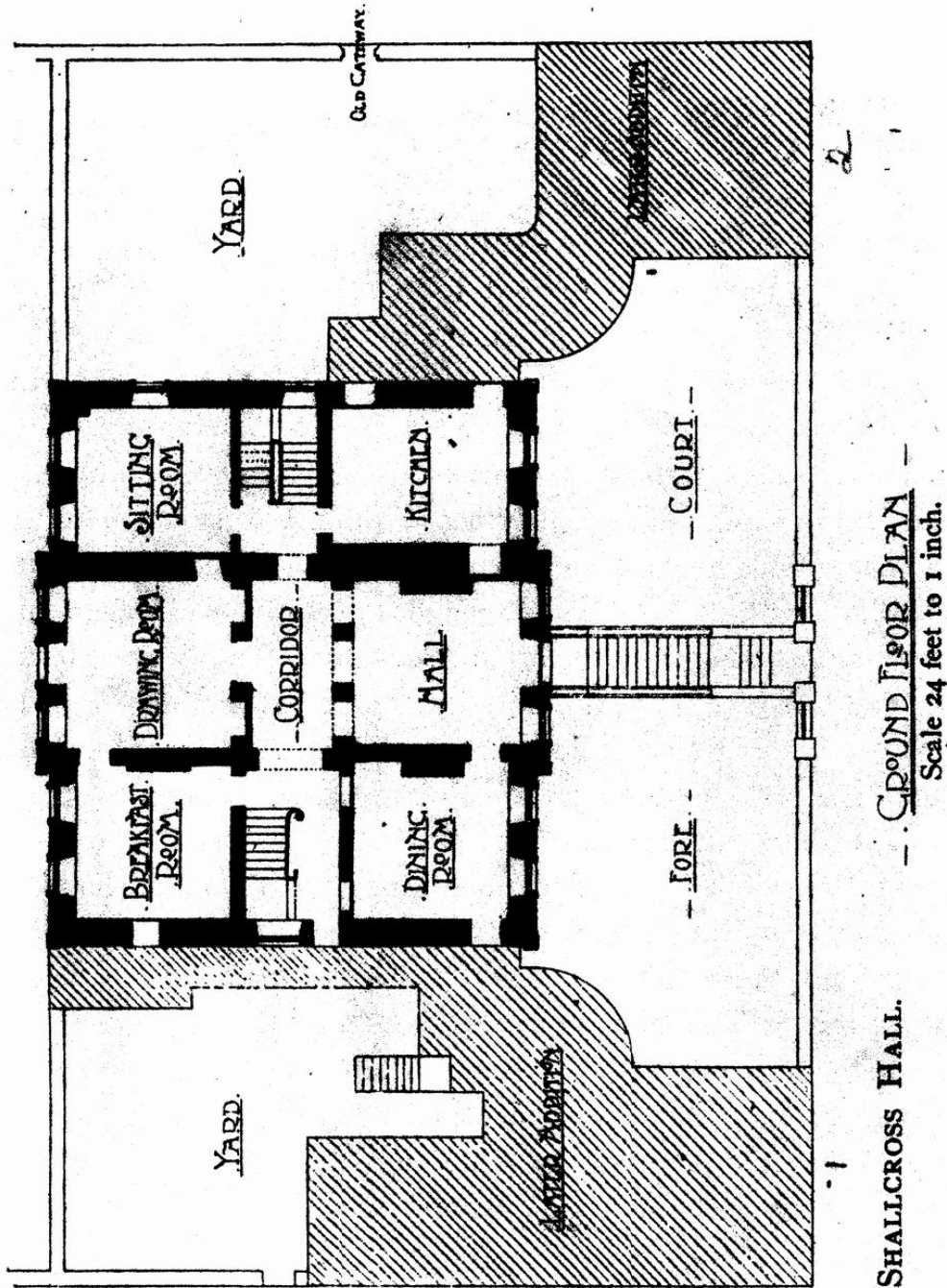
The building contains a large entrance hall divided from the main corridor by three deep arches, which are repeated on the upper floors, where they form doorways or cupboards.

The room on the left of the entrance, now used as a dining-room, is panelled from floor to ceiling, and though it has been altered from time to time, as the necessities for new doors suggested themselves, enough of the old panelling is left to show that it is of a much earlier date than the house, and very probably was brought from the Elizabethan building.

On the right of the entrance hall there has been a doorway, now blocked up, which at some time led to the kitchen and servants' quarters, but which, however, was probably not in the original design.

Facing the entrance through the before-mentioned arches is the door leading to the drawing-room—a fine room, with an entrance from the garden and commanding a view looking up Taxal Valley. On either side of the drawing-room are rooms probably used as breakfast room and boudoir, and a doorway

with the jambs cut on the angle connected one with the drawing-room. This latter is a feature of the doorways at Bradshaw Hall, and is an unusual survival in an eighteenth century house.



The corridor is broad, and runs the entire length of the house; at one end of it is the principal staircase, and at the other end the secondary or servants' staircase. Under this last is the original way to the cellars, and it is lighted by

a window of undoubtedly Elizabethan origin, which was probably re-used from some of the earlier buildings. On the other side of the hall, in a similar position, but lighting a cellar, is an exactly similar window, and with the exception of the panelling in the dining-room and a doorway and stone presently mentioned, these two windows seem to be the only



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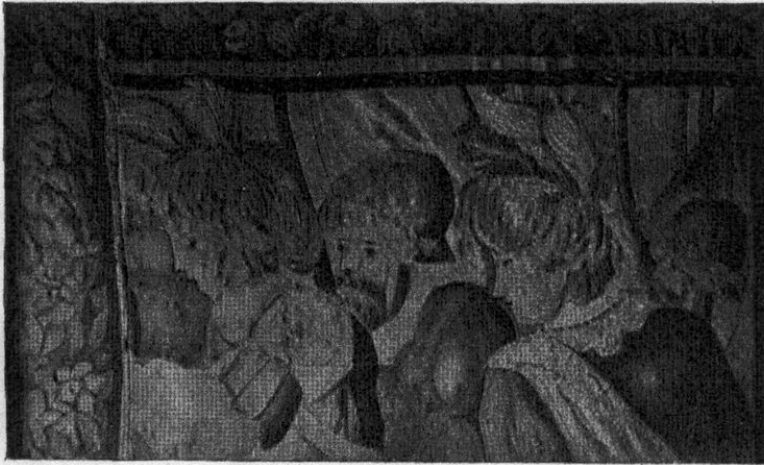
Shallcross Hall. A Fragment of Tapestry.

Elizabethan work re-used in the building of the present hall. The cellars are all on the north side, and are arched in brick.

In several of the rooms on the upper floors are large cupboards formed in the arches of the central wall and elsewhere, and in one room, supporting a beam, is a very interesting stone corbel, which seems to be a much earlier piece of work, and

was probably a stone re-used from the earlier buildings. There is also, as the entrance to the western courtyard, a gateway which is a good example of Elizabethan design.

Colonel Hall, of Horwich, who was born at Shallcross, informs me that so long as his family lived there an entire room was hung in tapestry. Unfortunately it has since disappeared, save for fragments which were rescued from the attics and carefully restored. Of these, the illustrations will give a far better idea than any words of mine, but the authorities at the South Kensington Museum, representing the Board of Education, have most kindly interested themselves in the matter, and report as follows:—"No illustration of such a subject as



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Shallcross Hall. A Fragment of Tapestry.

shewn upon the tapestries can be found in the literature on Tapestry in the Art Library of this Museum. Judging from the coarse style of weaving and the design of the borders these pieces are most probably Flemish (Brussels) of the very late seventeenth century. With regard to the question as to the subject treated, it may be stated that at the period indicated one of the most favourite themes was the history of Alexander the Great, a set of which was woven from the designs of various artists at nearly all the more celebrated factories, such as Brussels, Paris (Gobelins), Florence, etc. The special scene here shewn is impossible to decisively identify, but may represent

some incident after the surrender of one of the many towns that fell into the hands of Alexander."

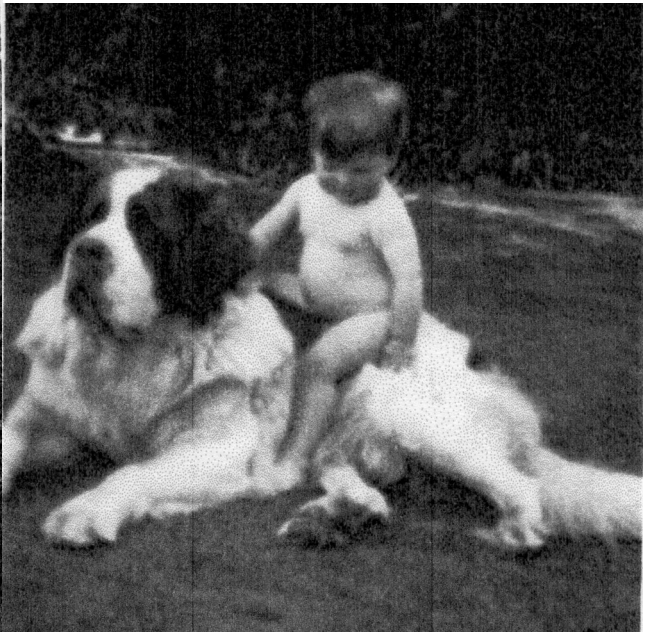
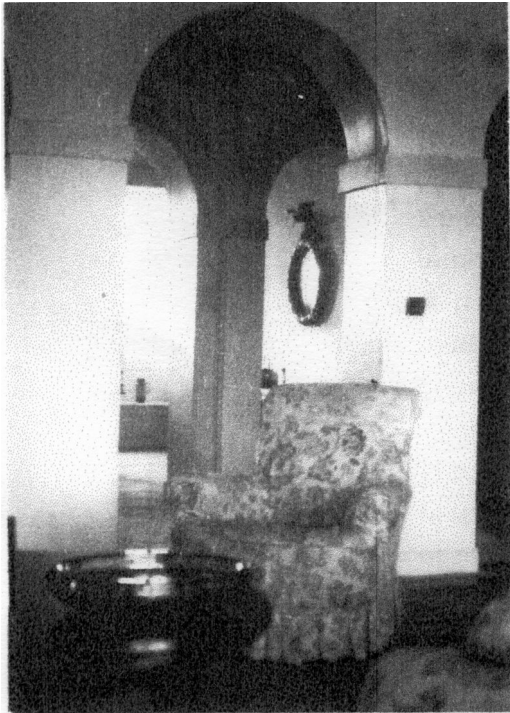
From this it will be seen that their date is only a few years prior to the building of the present hall.

The facades of the hall both north and south, especially that overlooking Whaley Bridge, with its handsome flight of steps leading to the main entrance, cannot be passed over in any review of Derbyshire architecture; for of the plain, and perhaps not justly appreciated, style of the first quarter of the eighteenth century they are faultless, and no doubt in its early years the hall must have been considered one of the show-places of the county. The steps, unfortunately, indicate some slight modernization, but subject to this their replica, although on a larger scale, is also to be found at Ditchley. The wings were added at a later date, when more accommodation was considered necessary, but they have in no way detracted from the appearance of the main building. In a semicircle, commencing from the east end of the hall and surrounding the crest of the hill on the southern side, is an avenue of fine forest trees planted upon a slightly raised bank. This, whilst adding much to the picturesque effect of the whole, has been a puzzle to many, for it has the appearance of a causeway and avenue of approach to the hall, and yet dies away into the fields on the west. If the bank had ever been an earthwork the filling in of its ditch would have practically levelled the whole, so it would seem to have been purposely banked up with soil from elsewhere. Years ago the principal collieries on the Shallcross estates lay beyond this belt on that side, and a quarter of a mile away, too, is the old, and now disused, High Peak Railway.* We can therefore well understand why the plantation was so made, namely, to act as a screen from the workings and a shelter from the east winds, from which so exposed a situation would otherwise be unprotected.

[EDITORIAL NOTE.—The Rev. W. H. Shawcross, vicar of Bretforton, Worcestershire, is preparing a history of the owners of Shallcross from its earliest times, which I trust will appear in our next volume.—W. J. ANDREW.]

* The old railway connecting the canals at Whaley Bridge and Cromford, worked by haulage from stationary engines.

Appendix:
Photos from 1953



.....the last occupants : Brutus + Laetitia