From a doc. held at Bourne.

BISHOPSBOURNE, which lies three and a half miles east of Canterbury is mentioned in the Domesday survey of 1086 as 'Bournes'. This is a reference to the bourne [or stream] called the Little Stour, which rises in the park at Bourne and flows through Bridge and Patrixbourne.

Although the magnificent double avenue of about 280 elm trees which once clothed the slope was cut down in 1945, possibly to help alleviate the chronic paper shortage which then prevailed, the beauty of the prospect remains quite outstanding. This is an English country gentleman's residence *par excellence*. In its present incarnation it represents the work of a former officer of Wellington's army in the Peninsula, William Andrews Nesfield [1793-1881]. Nesfield began by painting gardens in watercolours and ended by transforming them in person. The natural successor to such great landscapers as Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, he undertook the work here from 1848 at the behest of Bourne's then owner, Matthew Bell, the two men working in the closest possible harmony.

'Bourne Park had originally been laid out about 1700 on rigid if effective geometrical lines, with an avenue leading up to each front. Two of these survived until the second World War: the broad one up the slope at the back, and the lime avenue from the south front to Bishopsbourne Church. Originally, another avenue ran on the axis of the front door. Nesfield dammed up the stream to form a lake, the base of which the approach road crossed by means of a pretty classical bridge. The avenues flanking the house were softened by the planting on either side of the front of screens of mixed hardwoods and evergreens with some new stately cedars as outriders on the gentle slope of sward as it rises from the lake. The effect, though essentially pictorial and of the 19th century, beautifully emphasises by contrast the architectural qualities of the house. The transformation from landscape to geometry reflected the changed bias of the age and created something in harmony with English ideals of freedom in place of something derived ultimately from centralised Continental autocracies. The sense of freedom and good neighbourliness which permeates the English countryside is in great measure due to these ideals having been the social and aesthetic aims in the period of its creation. Nesfield was responsible for the geometric terrace on the south side. In the view from the house, Barham Down was opened up by felling a plantation that blocked it. A hop garden, reputed to be the oldest in East Kent, and famous for its yields, still adjoins the park.

We know that Bourne Park stands on or close to the site of a more ancient dwelling purchased by Sir Anthony Aucher who was active during the reign of Henry VIII. Aucher attended the Court as hundreds like him before and since - with the intent of preferring himself and getting on in the world. He married Elizabeth Hatton, the daughter of Queen Elizabeth's famous 'Dancing' Lord Chancellor, Christopher Hatton.

Sir Anthony Aucher held for a time the office of Master of the Jewels. He was also Surveyor of Victuals at Boulogne. Following the dissolution of the monasteries, he was well placed to pick up former ecclesiastical properties and to sell them on, usually at a handsome profit. Among these was the Manor of Bishopsbourne, formerly held by the See of Canterbury but which the placatory Archbishop Cranmer sold to King Henry.

Several letters of Aucher's, addressed from Bourne after 1545, not only demonstrate that he took up residence here almost as soon as he acquired the property, but also furnish irrefutable evidence that there was a house of some substance situated either on the site of the present one or about two hundred yards to the west. The former theory was endorsed by Christopher Hussey who, when writing of Bourne in *Country Life* in December 1944 stated that: 'some peculiarities in the plan and shape of the present house suggest that an older one may be incorporated in it'. The 'peculiarities' mentioned by Hussey were probably the unusual dimensions - 116ft 6ins. breadth with a depth of 47ft 4ins. - a parallelogram with similar fronts, which would suggest the incorporation of an older dwelling.

Further evidence that the house incorporates a Tudor one is that the front door does not open into the middle of the hall, as was then the rule, but at the side of one end, according to an older custom which suggests that it preserves the arrangement of a previous building. Further evidence is to be found in the fireplace of Bethesden marble in the hall. Bethesden marble was much used in early 17th century Kentish houses, patterned in the customary techniques of chipping away the background and polishing the raised surface that stands out black against the grey recesses. In the oval shield of the chimney-piece is an heraldic bird. This is odd, not least because the Aucher crest was a bull's head. What we have here would appear to be the 'falcon on a lure' which was the crest of one of Dame Elizabeth Aucher's Hewitt ancestors, a rich merchant in Elizabethan times.

When the house was acquired by Matthew Bell in the 1840s, soon after Queen Victoria had come to the throne, it was in a very dilapidated state. John Shaw the Younger, who in 1832 had succeeded his better-known

father as architect to Christ's Hospital, was commissioned to put it to rights. The architect of Wellington College, Berkshire, among the repairs he undertook was the re-setting of the stone string-course beneath the ground-floor windows. In the course of this work:

on the back of one of the stones taken out was found part of a coat of arms carved in bold relief. Fortunately we happened to be on the spot at the time and told the masons to preserve any others which might be found with similar carving. Three others were discovered, the four making a complete shield.

The coat-of-arms was that of the Poynings family, owners for two generations of the great castle of Westenhanger, which the Poynings had acquired during the reign of Henry VIII. In 1701 it is recorded to have been pulled down and the materials sold. 'Many other pieces of sculptured stone were found at Bourne, so it is evident that Lady Aucher built this house for her son at that time and drew on the sale of the Westenhanger ruins for its stonework'.

Although the house is very distinguished, we know nothing of the man who designed it. Some suggestion has been made that it may have been Sir John Vanbrugh, the architect of Castle Howard and Blenheim Palace, although this seems unlikely, not least because Vanbrugh built on a much grander scale. [The wits proposed for him the epitaph; 'Lie heavy on him, earth/ For he/ Laid many a heavy load on thee'.]

Bourne Park is akin to many smaller houses that prosperous squires and yeomen of East Kent were then building; and it was probably raised by a local master-mason, who must have been no mean architect.

The chimney-piece is evidently early 17th century, but how it got here is a mystery. In all probability, Lady Aucher introduced it from her former home, Westenhanger Castle, when that building was demolished in 1701.

The Auchers of Bourne [and Otterden] served as High Sheriffs for Kent. The family was staunchly royalist during the war with parliament and for this, at the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, Sir Anthony Aucher had been rewarded with a baronetcy. By his first wife he had seven sons, all of whom predeceased him. At the age of sixty-seven he married secondly, Elizabeth, the daughter of Robert Hewytt of the parish of St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London. By this lady, who was almost thirty years his junior, Sir Anthony produced two sons. When he died in 1692 he left gaming

debts amounting to £10,000, equivalent in modern money to a little over a million pounds.

His widow, Elizabeth, left to bring up four young children, faced ruin. Being a woman of strong character, she set to managing the 200-acre estate of Bourne herself. She did so with such success that by 1704 she had settled £8,600 of her husband's debts of honour. She had also improved the value of the estate.

Dame Elizabeth Aucher was trustee of the Bourne Estate on behalf of her 10-year-old son, Sir Anthony Aucher, who had also inherited his late father's baronetcy. Sadly, the young Sir Anthony died in 1694, just two years after his father. His title and estates now passed to his brother, Dame Elizabeth's second son, Sir Hewitt [or Hewytt] Aucher, who was then just eight years old. It was for Hewitt Aucher that his widowed mother, Lady Elizabeth, constructed Bourne Park in 1704. She lived to regret the act.

How was this house disposed when first built up? Lady Aucher devoted the whole north end of the house to office quarters. To the right of the hall was a small study, with a passage behind it, giving access to the servants' hall. In the north-west corner was the kitchen and the pantry. Corresponding to the hall, on the west side, was the original dining-room, with the morning-room at the south-west corner beyond the main stairs, the drawing room being in the south-east corner.

The staircase is an admirable and unusual example of Queen Anne carpentry, with fluted walnut columns for balusters and newels. Their use as newels, in conjunction with turned balusters, was common. Other examples can be found at Barjam Court nearby. Although their use throughout, with capitals of Ionic and Doric character, is unusual, another example of this it to be found at Hawnes in Bedfordshire, constructed circa 1725. The staircase ceiling is a wonderful example of Queen Anne plasterwork. As with that of the morning-room, it has elaborate stucco enrichment, in this case of an oval wreath with scrolled spandrels and a cove hung with floral festoons and four armorial shields. The latter bear the Aucher and the Hewitt arms, except that over the windows where, the plasterwork being in decay, the opportunity of its renewal in 1848 was taken to substitute a shield showing the arms of the family of Matthew Bell.

The morning-room ceiling is more advanced in design. Well-modelled reliefs of children, representing the Seasons, are introduced into the

corners, but the character and the execution of the scroll-work, though disposed with more freedom than in the traditional pattern of the staircase ceiling, can be matched piece by piece there, leaving no doubt that the same craftsman executed both. The cornices of several other rooms are similarly decorated.

As was then the common course, Dame Elizabeth Aucher fully expected to manage the Bourne Estate during the minority of her son, Sir Hewitt Aucher. To aid her in this she married on 21 January 1694 her estate clerk, Thomas Hunt, who very inconveniently died about four years later. He lies buried in Bishopsbourne Church.

Hewitt Aucher was a delicate boy and Dame Elizabeth refused to allow him to be sent away to school, preferring to engage a tutor, so that he might be taught at the family seat of Bourne. This privilege was not extended to his sisters, Elizabeth and Hester who, being female, were considered to be in less want of an education.

Nonetheless, about 1698, when Hewitt Aucher was thirteen years of age, he was sent to Cambridge, to attend the University. This proved to be a great mistake which his mother came to rue bitterly because it was during his time at Cambridge that this impressionable boy fell under the malign influence of a tutor, Dr. John Corbett. As Ian Taylor has written in his memorable monograph of the Aucher family, it was John Corbett 'who was to upturn' Dame Elizabeth's 'plans and create the devastating family rift, which was never to be healed, and which marred the meritorious history of the Aucher family'.

A Shropshire-born Doctor of Law: 'It was John Corbett who patiently enquired into the family circumstances. It was John Corbett who questioned the conduct of Dame Elizabeth, and it was John Corbett who awakened in Hewytt the sense of injustice, and determination to remedy the mismanagement of the estate which Sir Hewytt accused his mother of perpetrating. During the years following 1707 Bourne was an unhappy place where anxieties ran high, tensions were extreme, and bitterness acute'.

The truth of what really happened during this dreadful period in the history of Bourne will now never be fully known. Sir Hewytt granted Dr Corbett a virtual power of attorney. Armed with this the Doctor descended on Bourne and demanded from Dame Elizabeth the surrender of all account and estate books. He used the information which he claimed these

contained to levy against her a charge of gross mismanagement of the estate and of the 'unnecessary' rebuilding of Bourne Park. She was forced to submit to a personal examination of her financial affairs. At this Corbett declared that Dame Elizabeth owed her son at least £10,000 in restitution. He also declared that the annuity of £660 a year bequeathed to her by her late husband was not a valid bequest and that in future she should be paid £160 a year only. As Ian Taylor rightly points out: 'The pain of the examination and the social, emotional and financial consequences are difficult to imagine'.

There was worse to come. Even the reduced annuity of £160 which was granted to her on the understanding that 'if she should part with everything all should be well betwixt her and her son' was based on a 'treacherous assurance'. It was not paid with any degree of regularity and in consequence Dame Elizabeth was reduced to near penury. In 1711 she was further disadvantaged when Dr Corbett married her elder daughter, Elizabeth, who by this stratagem passed into the enemy camp. In the year of her daughter's marriage, Dame Elizabeth's plight was so desperate that she was forced to sell her personal possessions. The year following she had to adopt the humiliating expedient of presenting herself in person at Bourne to seek shelter. She had nowhere else to go. As Taylor records:

The few months which followed must have been the most wretched in the life of the now elderly Dame Elizabeth Aucher. She was treated with loathing by her son and her daughter, as well as with contempt and hatred by her son-in-law [who had not in accordance with the custom of the day requested her permission to marry her daughter]. Dame Elizabeth was an outcast in the very home which she had built for her son. She had less status than the servants ... She had neither power no position, she was 'not permitted to eat at table', but survived on the left-overs from the meals of her own family, secretively fed to her by anxious but sympathetic servants below stairs; who feared for their security if discovered helping Dame Elizabeth. Had it not been for the kindness, the emotional support, and the material generosity of the Reverend Dr. George Thorpe, Rector of St. Mary's, Bishopsbourne, who had been a family friend as well as the local parson since 1679, in supplying her meals several days each week, her poverty and wretchedness would have been even worse.

The dreadful state of affairs could not continue, and in 1713 Dame Elizabeth again left Bourne to reside in Canterbury, and with reluctance but necessity presented a petition in Chancery for the restoration of her

entitlements under the clauses of her late husband's will, and for due compensation for the ill treatment by her son, by Corbett, and by her daughter, Corbett's wife, Elizabeth.

It was later alleged that Corbett had treated Dame Elizabeth in a peremptory manner and that both he and Hewytt had adopted 'a very unnatural and cruel attitude' toward her. Her attempts to have an unbiased party examine the accounts were refused, Corbett claiming sole right to determine the issue.

In the second year of the reign of George I, the case came before the Lord Chancellor. After a three-day hearing, he found in favour of Dame Elizabeth on 22 June 1715. He determined that 'Corbett was a friend of Sir Hewytt and had no regard for the interests of Dame Elizabeth; that Corbett used her with great hardship ... by his demands and threats to her ... and terrified her ...' He also found that Dame Elizabeth's agreement to forego the original £660 due to her under her husband's will and accept the lower figure of £160 'was caused by her being a moaning and grieving woman from all the hardships she had endured'.

Hewytt and Corbett were ordered to present proper accounts to the Court. When they failed to do so the Court appointed an official 'to receive all rents and profits of the estate, and pay the same to Dame Elizabeth Aucher'. In 1716 the Court finally awarded Dame Elizabeth the sum of £24,695, equivalent in modern money to £2,082,000. This award so incensed Corbett and Sir Hewytt that they 'had the temerity to appeal to the House of Lords' in the hope of getting it set aside. The appeal was dismissed and Dame Elizabeth had, so to speak, jumped the last fence to win. 'Bourne Mansion House' however, continued the property of Sir Hewitt, who with his sister and brother-in-law continued to manage its operation.

Dame Elizabeth never returned to Bourne. It is believed that she lived in financial comfort in Canterbury until her death, which is said to have been 'at a grand old age'. In a last act of spite, her son refused to allow her remains to be interred at Bourne. All knowledge of their last resting place is now lost.

The weak and foolish Sir Hewitt Aucher died 4 June 1726, aged forty, having never married, when the family baronetcy became extinct. In the absence of a male heir, Sir Hewitt was succeeded by his sister, Elizabeth. According to the law of that time Bourne thereby came into the possession

of her husband, the loathsome Dr Corbett, who thus achieved what he had always wanted - to make himself Master of Bourne both in title and in fact. He lived on here for ten years more, until his death in 1736, aged about fifty-five, when he was interred in St. Mary's Church, Bishopsbourne. Elizabeth, his widow - Dame Elizabeth's treacherous daughter - continued here with her children and her son-in-law, Stephen Beckingham, until she followed her husband to the grave, aged eighty-two, in September 1764.

Elizabeth Corbett bore her scheming husband five children - all daughters. The eldest of these joint co-heiresses, Mary Catherine, married Stephen Beckingham of Grays Inn as his second wife. Beckingham it was, with his shrewd lawyer's brain, who bought up the shares in the house and estate of his sisters-in-law. Interestingly, his first marriage [to Mary Cox in 1729] is the subject of one of Hogarth's earliest and most delightful 'conversation pieces', now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York. It has not been seen on English soil since the Conversation Pieces Exhibition held at No.25 Park Lane, London, in 1930. According to a tablet in the church, Mary Cox died 4 October 1738.

Beckingham who occupied Bourne as squire until his death in 1756, came from a family long established in Essex where his ancestor, also called Stephen Beckingham, had constructed Beckingham Hall at Tolleshunt Darcy in 1543.

Our Stephen Beckingham whose father, Ralph, was also of Grays Inn, specialised in cases before the Court of Chancery, the most protracted of the three divisions of the High Court of Justice. Cases here took so long to resolve that the phrase 'to get a man's head into Chancery' became a popular Victorian saying and meant that once a person was so situated the lawyers 'might pummel him as much and as long as they choose'. Dickens alluded to the exhausting nature of Chancery proceedings in *Bleak House*, citing the case of *Jarndyce and Jarndyce*, based on a true dispute which lasted eighty years. If Stephen Beckingham was able to protract his dealings for even one tenth this time he almost certainly died a rich man. His life, however, was not without its tragedies. In May 1749 he was forced to have his daughter, Sarah, committed as a lunatic.

When Stephen Beckingham died in 1756, he bequeathed Bourne to his son, also called Stephen, also a Grays Inn lawyer. The younger Stephen Beckingham [1729-1813] seems not to have cared much for Bourne. He chose to reside either in London, where he had a house in Knightsbridge,