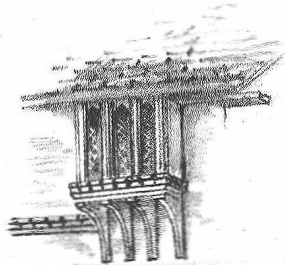
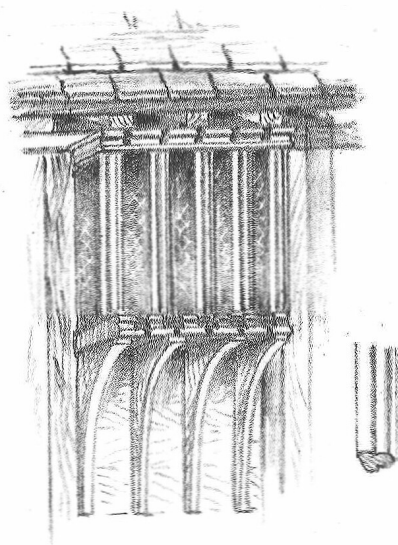


The Old Shambles, Chesterfield.

BY GEORGE BAILEY.

THESE old Shambles are a very interesting example of the way in which a Butchers' Market was arranged in the middle ages ; and although they are gradually being taken down to make way for more modern buildings, now that they are no longer required, a new market having been erected to supersede them, still enough remains, from which a very good idea of their original character may be formed. They originally occupied four narrow passages, or alleys, intersecting at right angles. The central passage runs from east to west, and the three others from north to south. The three last named are parallel with the Market Place, and may be entered from High Street or Broad Pavement. The central passage runs from the Market Place to Packers' Row.

It will be seen from the accompanying sketches that the buildings were constructed almost entirely of strong oaken beams, with the intervening spaces filled in with lath and plaster, most of which has now fallen out, leaving only the framework ; and that they were roofed with thin stone slabs, such as may often be seen still in use for roofing cottages in the northern parts of the county, where such slabs of stone are easily obtainable. It will also be noticed that there is some slight attempt at ornament on the heads and at the bases of the oriel windows ; and that, in one instance, this is carried along in a line with the bases of the windows, forming a string course ; but that there is not, on any of the



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buildings now standing, any further attempt at ornamentation ; but, on referring to Ford's "*History of Chesterfield*," we find the following statement. Speaking of the Shambles, he says :—" East of Irongate, and parallel to it, is a passage, near the upper end of which stands a very ancient building, said to have formerly belonged to the Knights Templars. This, as well as the older parts of the Shambles, is composed principally of oak, some of which is curiously carved, and thought to be of Saxon origin." On visiting Chesterfield, for the purpose of making sketches, and examining the buildings, one of the "Knights of the Cleaver" pointed out the building figured (fig. 1) on Plate VII., as being the one formerly possessed by the "Knights Templars," and, on "comparing notes," we found it to be quite correct so far as that it is the identical building mentioned in the above extract. It is situate exactly in the position therein stated ; but our disappointment was great, to find no traces of the "curious carving," and not the slightest appearance of there ever having been any on any part of the buildings now left. This particular one is in an extremely dilapidated condition, the timber framework being all that remains ; the lath and plaster, which formerly filled the space between the timber, has fallen away ; so have most, if not all, the roofing slabs. It will be observed, on referring to the plate, that there is, in the centre of the upper story, a very pretty oriel window, having four lights, and that there is an embattled moulding at the head, and also at the base ; the whole being supported on four plain brackets.

It is not at all unlikely that these old timbers have been standing in their present form as long since as the 14th century. The length of time oak beams will last is very surprising ; those of which the little church at Greensted, in Essex, was built being, undoubtedly, 870 years old, and there is very good reason to suppose they may continue for hundreds of years longer. Allowing this, still we see no reason whatever to suppose that these Shambles are of "Saxon origin ;" there is nothing in the construction of any of them to support such a supposition. We have been very desirous to find out whether there had ever been any house

on which there had been "curious carving," and, on being informed that T. P. Wood, Esq., would be most likely to satisfy us on the point, we accordingly communicated our wish to him, and he writes, "I very well recollect the old building in the Shambles you refer to; it was pulled down some dozen years ago, and a music warehouse built upon the site There was some nice carved old oak about it, and one of the old town wells was under it. It was intended to have had it photographed, but the photographer came a day too late." Mr. Wood referred us to S. Rollinson, Esq., the architect who designed the new building, and he fortunately had in his possession a rough sketch he made of the old house before it was removed, and kindly placed in our hands the materials from which Plate IX. has been made, and from which a very fair idea of its appearance at that time may be gathered; but it is not of so interesting a character, as to its architecture, as are the other three; nor, from the point of view from which the sketches were made, can we perceive any appearance of the carved work mentioned by Ford. Possibly this may have been on that side of the house hidden from the eye of the spectator. We, however, doubt very much whether there ever was anything in the shape of "curious carving," unless the rude embattled work on the windows may be so designated. It is just possible that Ford did take it for "Saxon," this term being at one time used to indicate anything ancient. We will now proceed to describe, more in detail, the drawings in the three plates which are attached to these notes.

The most interesting and picturesque group of buildings now remaining is represented on Pl. VII. (fig. 2); part of it is still used as a dwelling. There are, in the upper story, two oriel windows; that one nearest to the observer has three lights, the other only one light in the centre. Both are ornamented in the same way as that of which fig. 1 is a sketch, only that they have no moulding at the heads, and that at the base is continued as a string course from one to the other, thus forming an agreeable break, or relief, to the front of the house. We may remark, in passing, that the leaden spouts at the heads of the windows of Mr. Gadsby's house



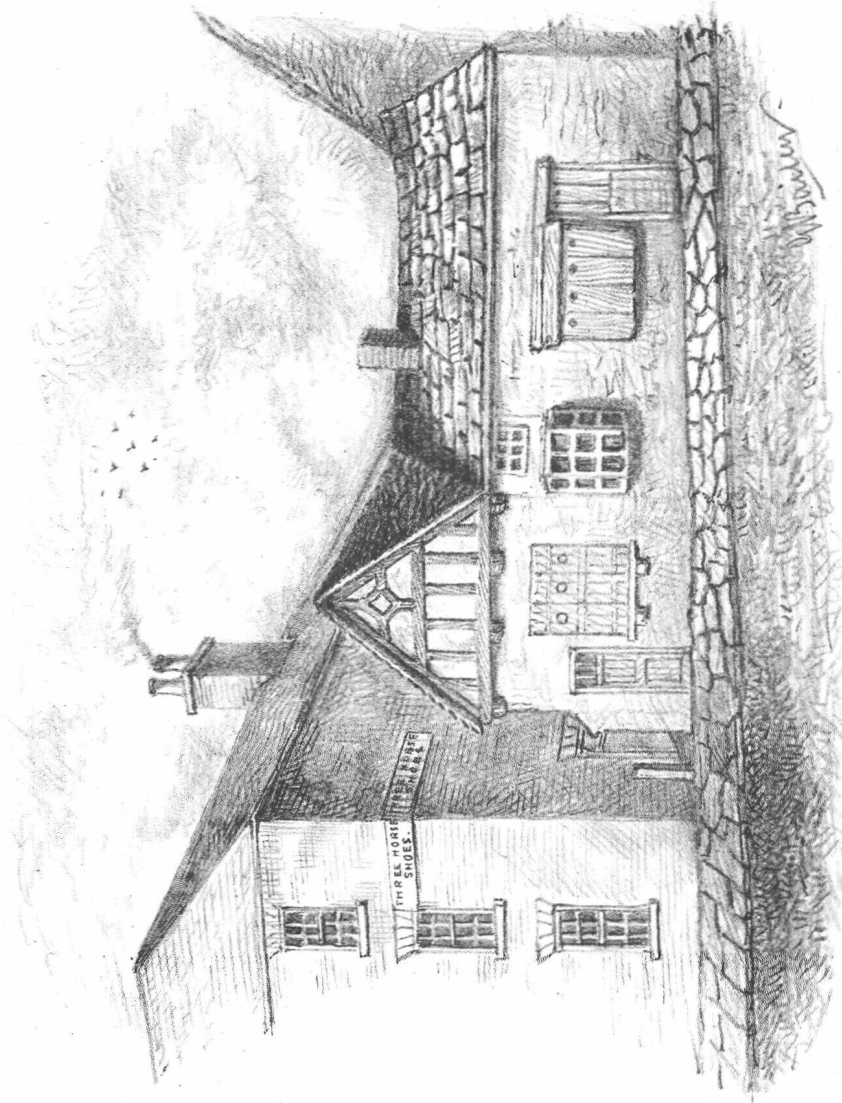
THE OLD SHAMBLES, CHESTERFIELD.

in Tenant Street, Derby, have the same kind of embattled ornaments as these have, which seems to indicate that both were erected during the Plantagenet period. The house of which we now write is covered on the outside with plaster, which entirely hides the timber framework of the walls; but, on entering the shop, we found plaster between the beams only, and they appear to have always been so exposed. There is no flooring between that of the shop and the roof, which is open to the rafters and tiling, the shop having evidently been used for purposes of slaughter, as one of the pulleys is still in its place, the floor, doubtless, having been removed to adapt the place to this purpose. It is a very long time, too, since the windows were used for any other purpose than as ventilators. Over the shops are huge penthouses to keep off the rain and snow, and also to act as screens from the sun's rays; they are wide enough to meet together in the centre, and form a covered way, and thus were rude foreshadowings of the elegant arcades of the present day. Provision is made for carrying off the rain-water and other fluids by means of a channel in the centre of the pavement, which is made to slope towards it from either side, and, as there is a very considerable decline from north to south, no fluids from the shops or slaughter-houses would remain stationary. In this respect the situation chosen was a fortunate one for the inhabitants, on sanitary grounds.

Another very characteristic cluster of these buildings is represented on Plate VIII.; it will give a very good idea of the quaint appearance of the place in its original condition. It is interesting as bringing before our modern eyes a portion of the belongings of a mediæval town, such as can now be seen in but few, if in any other town in England at the present time; such, too, as will not be very much longer found even in Chesterfield of the crooked spire, for steam and increasing facilities have at last begun to make their mark on it, and it is joining in the general race.

The windows are so pretty that we have thought it advisable to give sketches of them on a rather increased scale, so that their construction may be better understood than they would be from

the small drawings. It will be unnecessary to add anything further to what has already been written on Plate IX. After all, we do not appear to have made very much progress as regards the ventilation of markets for the sale of butchers' meat. It is not a little singular that we still build them in narrow alleys and confined spaces just as objectionable as were those of the 14th century. No one on entering one of these markets in any of our large towns, but will be conscious, by means of the olfactory nerve, of an ancient 14th century odour pervading the atmosphere of the market-house; and its cause will soon be discovered, for all round the market are small huts, having, oftentimes, no vent whatever—except into the central space occupied by florists, old book sellers, vendors of lace, dealers in eggs and bacon, cheese and butter, oranges and apples. It does seem, as if we ought to know that this is a mixture which should not exist in these advanced days. A butchers' market should be confined to those gentlemen of the blue robe, and to the commodity they have for sale; and, until this is the case, we have no word to say against our respectable ancient friends of the middle ages, for they certainly managed these things better, to the full extent of their light, as they had "a place for everything, and everything in its place;" and we might do worse than imitate them in this respect.



The Old Symbles, Chesterfield.