

## The Stone House Prebend, Little Chester, Derby.

BY GEORGE BAILEY.

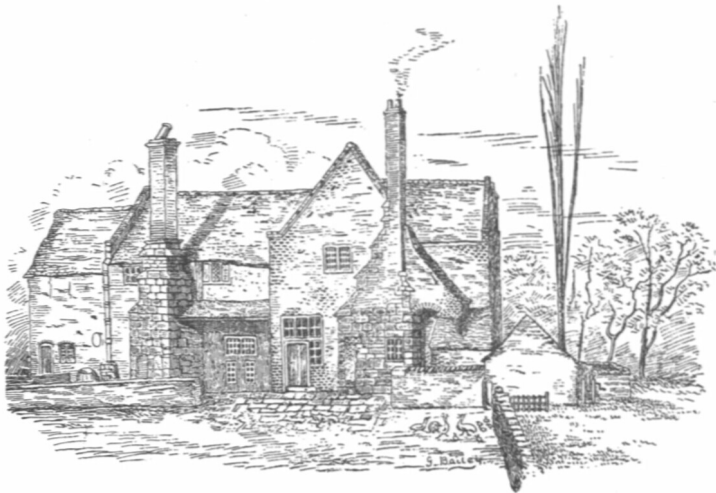


HERE is frequent mention made in old documents of land having been held by the clergy, at Little Chester, from an early period. In Domesday Book we read, "In eodem burgo erat in dominio regis 1 ecclesia cum vii. clericis qui tenebat ii. caracutes terre libere in Cestre:" (A.D. 1086.) And in 1316 the College of All Saints\* held several farms there. Of two of these farms, special mention is made in a deed called Queen Mary's (1555), in which she confirms a previous grant of these and other church lands, made by Henry VIII. to the Bailiffs and Burgesses of Derby. It is to one of these, to which the name of the "Stone House Prebend" is therein given, that the following remarks apply. There is, at the present time, an old farm house standing on the banks of the Derwent, at Little Chester, of which some considerable portions appear to be remains of this house. They not improbably date as far back as the middle of the reign of Henry VI. This is warranted by the architectural characteristics of these remains. A reference to the drawing will render this evident. There are two massive stone chimneys shown there; and there is another on the river front of the house, of the same date (as will be seen from the drawing on the next page). These chimneys prove that a good stone house once stood there, but that it was

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\* See Chron. All Saints' Church.

allowed to go to ruin. This would no doubt be after the dissolution of the College in Edward VI. reign ; the stone of the old building being carried away and used elsewhere, the chimney stacks excepted.



THE STONE HOUSE PREBEND.

It is not easy to decide when the house assumed its present form, for although the gable on the garden front has in it the date 1594,



RIVER FRONT OF THE STONE HOUSE PREBEND.

it is plain that the brick house now standing cannot altogether be of that date, though some portions of it may be, and it is quite possible that the mullioned windows may have been taken out and the present ones inserted, this having been done at the other farm near by, and of which something will be said in a future notice. Allowing this, it does not seem likely that the dated stone belongs to the present brickwork, which must be later than Elizabeth's time.

There is little doubt that more than one rebuilding, or partial rebuilding, has taken place; this can be seen more easily from the interior of the house, various adaptations and alterations being at once revealed. The floors are on various levels, and the staircase is in an out-of-way corner scarcely likely to be the original position in the stone house. The room on the ground floor, overlooking the garden, is a large and handsome one, fully panelled in oak, but it has been divided by a lath and plaster partition to allow of a corridor, thus destroying its proportions, the handsome carved and inlaid oak chimney-piece being thrust into a corner, instead of occupying the centre of the room. From this we conclude that the present house does not quite stand on the old foundations, and besides, this is the only fully panelled room now remaining. There is, however, little doubt that during the reign of Queen Elizabeth the house was for the most part rebuilt, and that it has undergone several changes since; and the handsomely carved date stone now in the gable is, together with the panelled room, part of the Elizabethan house. This stone, besides the date, bears a unique sculpture of the arms of the borough, and as we give a copy of it a reference to it is easily made; from it the reader will see that it is of good design and well executed, the Buck is lodged in a park having a very elegant entrance gate or door, the shield is indicated by a delicate piece of chain work, and he reclines under a holly tree in fruit, and that it is altogether a very good piece of Elizabethan renaissance.

It is not a little curious that there are three different designs of the arms of Derby: that now before us; the beautiful

old silver common seal; and one seen in old books of maps, and in old representations of county arms. This latter is represented as argent, a buck on speed, over five mole hills, on each side a branch of laurel, all proper. This is of the time of

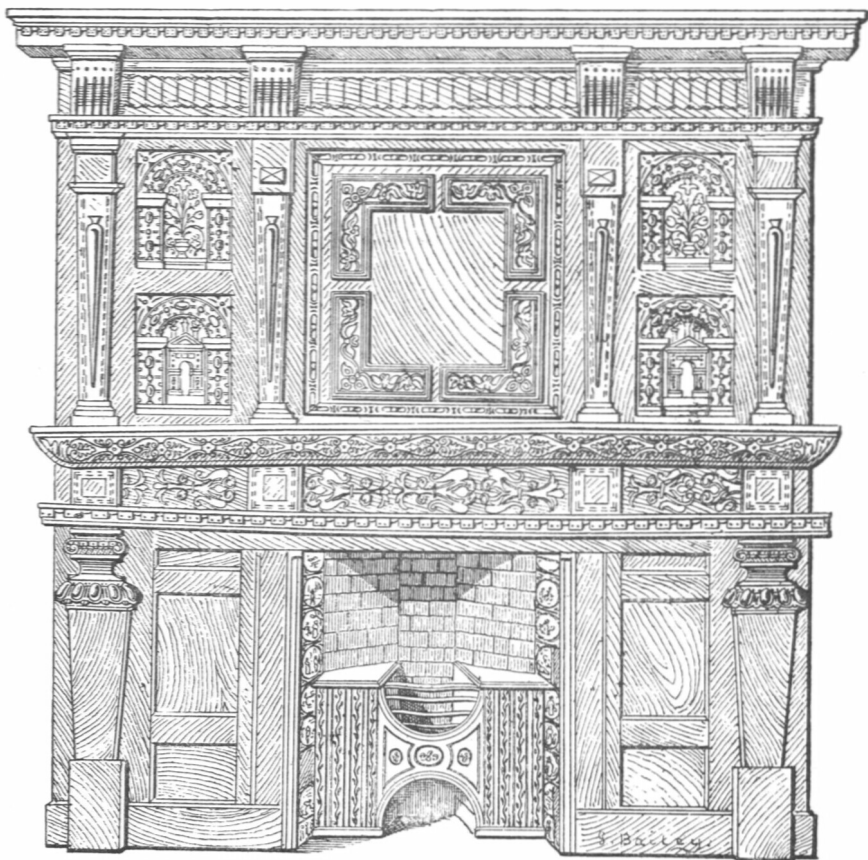


ARMS OF THE BOROUGH OF DERBY.—STONE HOUSE PREBEND.

George III. (1746). The silver seal, however, has more the appearance of a fourteenth or fifteenth century seal, but we have no means of ascertaining its precise date.

About the panelling there is nothing uncommon; but the chimney-piece is a very excellently designed and well-proportioned work; of course it has been a good deal broken, and some portions are gone, still a very good idea can be formed of its original appearance. There is much nice work in it, the four arched panels between the pilasters are carved, but the plants in the vases and the two porticoes in the centre are inlaid *tarsia* work, the woods used are black and white, the designs are good, and in their original clean state must have looked very handsome; they are unfortunately so dirty now that it is difficult to see them; the four corner squares in the centre panel are of similar work, as is also the flat piece under the mantel, the latter, however, is carved. Unfortunately,

from the smallness of the scale on which it was necessary to make this drawing, the beauty of these details could not be sufficiently brought out, to do that properly would have necessitated detailed drawings of a very much increased size, the size of the whole



OAK CHIMNEY PIECE.—STONE HOUSE PREBEND.

work is 8' 9"  $\times$  9' or nearly square. The fire-place, though an old one, is not original; no doubt the fire would be on an open hearth, with fire dogs, and rather wider than it is now. At the edge of the fire-place, on each side, are a number of old Dutch

tiles more or less perfect, but very dirty; they are blue pattern on a white ground, many of them have Scripture subjects painted on them, such as the shepherds at the manger, St. Paul let down in a basket, Christ washing disciples' feet and healing a leper, Elijah fed by ravens, Joseph and his brethren; others are rural subjects, as a maid and milk-pails, a man fishing, a landscape, &c. It will have been noticed that the panel in the centre above the fireplace is blank, but we are informed that there used to be on it a carved panel with the borough arms, like that in the gable outside, and we have seen in private hands an iron casting taken, to all appearance, from the central portion of the panel in the gable. This, however, could never have been in the centre panel, the space is too small for it by about two inches, so that if there ever was such a carved panel it cannot now be traced.

It is pleasant to realize that this ancient place has escaped the various vicissitudes to which it has been at various times subject, and that it still remains in the hands of the Corporation of Derby, to whom it was originally granted when it ceased to be the property of the Church. It now forms a useful adjunct to the Grammar School—itsself an ancient foundation—and with its river frontage for boating and bathing, and its pleasant cricket ground, is perhaps in its old age doing as useful work as it ever did. The old house itself might be improved internally, and altogether put into repair, without in any way damaging its quaintness, or destroying its time-honoured remains, carrying us back, as they do, to a time before Domesday Book was compiled. We have not thought it desirable to enter into the history of the College of All Saints, that can be much better read, so far as it is known, in *The Chronicles of All Saints*'. Our business is only to gather up some fragments of the existing fabric, and by means of this short paper and its few illustrations, to preserve some memories of the times of old to those who shall come after us. The old house remains above ground, but beneath it are the buried remains of a much older history, associated with more stirring events, and connecting us with that great city of which it used to be said, that to it all roads lead—Rome.