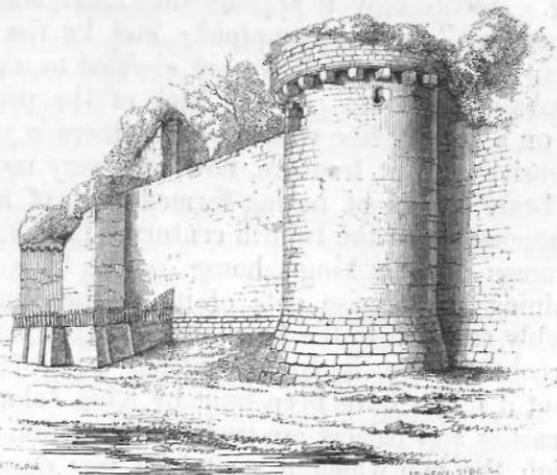


ON THE BUILDING CALLED THE KING'S HOUSE, AND
OTHER ARCHITECTURAL REMAINS IN THE TOWN OF
SOUTHAMPTON.



PART OF THE WALLS OF SOUTHAMPTON.

THE direct passage from Southampton to the coast of Normandy rendered it, so long as our sovereigns retained their French domains, the most convenient port for their embarkation, while its favourable geographical position, appreciated in early times by the Romans, made it the chief resort of merchants from southern Europe. Its vicinity to the opulent city of Winchester, long celebrated for its annual fair on St. Giles's hill, was another attraction for mediæval traders, who were thus enabled to dispose of their cargoes without incurring the cost and peril of a voyage, or land-journey, to London. From Southampton our first Richard sailed on his memorable crusade, and ancient accounts tell us how the sheriff supplied him ten thousand horse-shoes with double sets of nails for his chivalry, and eight hundred Hampshire hogs for the provision of his fleet^a. Thither came, in the infancy of English commerce, those "great ships from Bayonne," laden with Eastern products, the arrival of one of which was, even so late as the thirteenth century, an event anxiously expected by royalty; and it was there that the merchants of Bourdeaux landed their

^a Rot. Pip. 2 Ric. I.

cargoes of wine, the prisage of which, two tuns from each ship, was long an important item of the crown revenue.

It is obvious that during the times this port was so much frequented by English sovereigns, there must have been some place for their accommodation while waiting to embark, or on landing. Accordingly it appears that there was anciently a "king's house" in Southampton^b; and by the joint aid of tradition and early records we are enabled to identify its site and probable remains. At the back of the present custom house, on a parallel line with the quay, there is yet remaining an extensive ancient frontage, now in a very mutilated state, which bears marks of having formed part of a building of some importance in the twelfth century. This edifice is popularly known as "the king's house." We have no means of ascertaining the precise date of its erection, but it may be reasonably ascribed to the long and energetic reign of Henry the Second; there is some evidence against the supposition that it might have been built by King John, to whom so many castles and palaces are traditionally given, since early in his reign the hall which it contained was decayed, and the keeper of Knutwood forest supplied twenty rafters (*cheverones*) for the repairs of its roof^c. The next references to this building are important, as they demonstrate that it was situated by the water side, *on a quay*. By writs dated respectively in the fifth and sixth years of Henry the Third^d, the bailiffs of Southampton were directed to repair the quay before the king's house. These commands appear to have been neglected or imperfectly fulfilled; for by another writ dated Nov. 21, in the seventh year of the same reign, they were ordered "to repair the quay this winter, lest the king's house should be damaged thereby, and, at an opportune time, to cause it to be well built^e." In the following year the bailiffs had directions to mend the gutters of the king's chamber^f.

Now if the present custom house were removed, this ruinous frontage in its rear, which we believe to have been the "king's house," would, in point of fact, be situated on the quay, although the vacant space before it might be rather large: there is every reason, however, to suppose that anciently this

^b There was an edifice so called at Portsmouth which had a hall attached to it.

^c Rot. Claus. 9 Joh. m. 12.

^d Rot. Claus. 5 and 6 Hen. III. mm.

4. 17.

^e Rot. Claus. 7 Hen. III. m. 26.

^f Rot. Claus. 8 Hen. III. m. 3.

building was more extensive; it was probably quadrangular, and in some measure fortified, or at least thoroughly enclosed, and isolated from surrounding edifices; a fact which seems to be indicated by a direction to the bailiffs, in 1223, to make a "gateway to the courtyard of the king's house^g." Reiterated orders during the years 1224 and 1225, for the repair of the house and quay, shew that either the bailiffs had failed to obey previous directions, or that the works had been imperfectly executed^h. In the latter year the bishop of Winchester had the custody of the house, at an annual fee of fifteen shillingsⁱ.

Besides containing a hall, a chapel^k, and the several apartments necessary for royal use, it is probable that this building included a cellar in which the prisage butts were stored^l. The various operations connected with the proper care of a large stock of wine, required space for their exercise, and thus an extensive quay was adapted not only to the personal convenience of the king, but to the landing of his wines, and to the accommodation of the coopers, guagers, sealers, carters, and boatmen, who were employed about the royal stores in those times when our princes were accustomed to dispose of their superfluous stock.

It may be necessary to remark that the "king's house" was certainly a building distinct from the castle of Southampton; this is proved by the document already cited, which shews that the former might be injured by the dilapidated state of the quay on which it stood; therefore it could not have been much above high water mark; whereas "the elevated position of the castle must have effectually secured it from all risk of having even its base washed by the most violent waves which a storm could raise in the land-locked harbour which it overlooked^m." The "king's houses in the castle" are frequently mentioned in early records, and to readers who are not con-

^g Rot. Claus. 8 Hen. III. p. 1. m. 10.

^h Rot. Claus. 9 Hen. III. p. 2. m. 1, 3.

ⁱ Ibid., m. 13.

^k "Et in reparacione capelle Regis de Suhampton', et domorum Regis ibidem et gutterarum earundem, lxiiij.s. vj.d. ob."—Rot. Pip. 14 Hen. III.

^l The king's cellar at Southampton was of ample dimensions; it is mentioned as containing a hundred and twenty tuns of wine: but so large was the stock accumulated at times, that the sheriff, or butler, was obliged to rent cellars. See the Pipe

Roll already cited. It is hardly necessary to observe that in medieval days cellars were not always under ground.

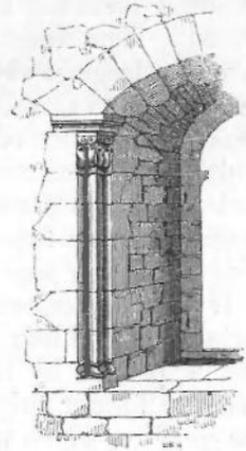
^m "Sketches of Hampshire," by the late John Duthy, Esq., p. 145. I gladly take this opportunity of calling attention to a provincial work exhibiting considerable research, much ingenious conjecture, and written in a remarkably agreeable style. The notice of Southampton, supplied after Mr. Duthy's decease, is scarcely equal to the rest of the volume.

versant with those authorities, it might appear that the edifices were identical. But it is well known that the term "domus" was applied to various structures, generally, with the exception of the keep, of an unsubstantial character, raised within the enceinte of a medieval fortress, often mere pent-houses of wood and plaster, always in need of repair.

The preceding observations may possibly induce local antiquaries to pursue still further the history of this ancient building, the identification of which is thus attempted, and it is hoped they may also contribute to its preservation as an interesting relic of early times. The few architectural features it now offers, belong to the latter part of the twelfth century, and of these the most prominent is a window in a tolerably perfect



Window, King's house, Southampton.



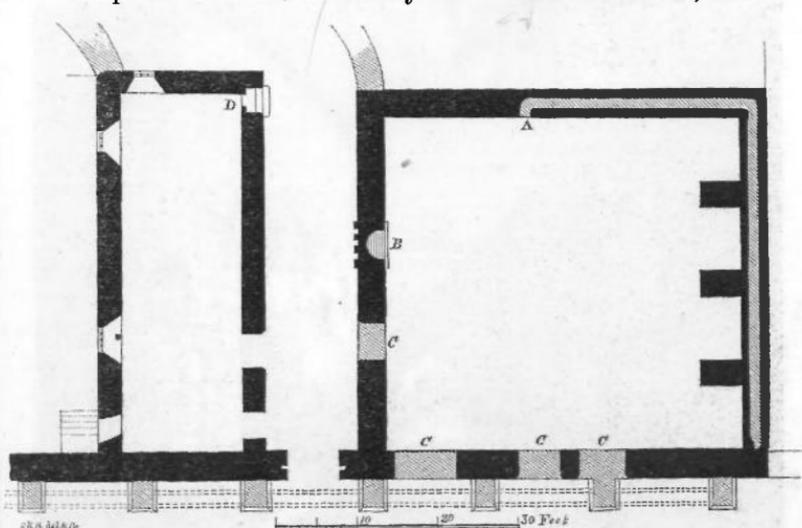
Interior jamb of window

state; it has a segmental arch and a drip-stone over it, with the usual Norman abacus moulding at the impost; this is continued as a string along the wall, though broken in places by later insertions. Interiorly it is ornamented with shafts in the jambs, sunk in a square recess in the angle, having capitals sculptured with foliage of a peculiar but late Norman character; the bases approaching to Early English. This window is altogether remarkable and of an unusual design. It is now closed by wooden shutters, and in all likelihood was never glazed.

The peculiar construction of the west wall of Southampton is familiar to antiquaries; an accurate measurement of the arches was taken by Sir Henry Englefield in 1801ⁿ; and the reader may be referred to his essay for a minute description

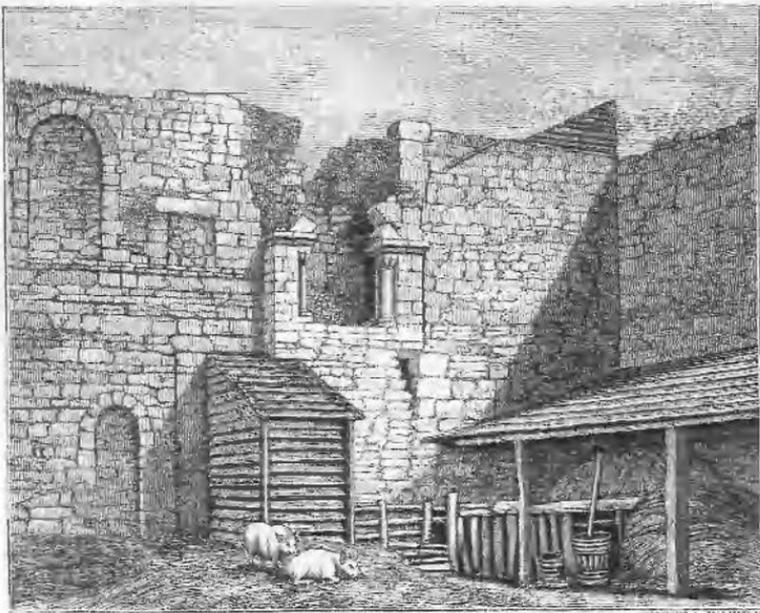
ⁿ "A Walk through Southampton," 4to. 1801. p. 23.

of this early work which, being of transition Norman character, is possibly a remnant of the walls built by the men of Southampton early in the reign of John; that monarch having allowed them two hundred pounds out of their feefarm rent for the enclosure of the town°. Adjoining to a postern gate in this wall, are the remains of two houses of ancient date. One of these has preserved scarcely any original features, excepting a Norman doorway; the other house is of about double the size, and situated on the opposite side of a narrow lane which leads to the gateway. It is nearly perfect, except the roof, and is probably one of the oldest houses remaining in England; being of rather earlier character than either the Jew's house at Lincoln, or the other house in the same street, or those at Christ Church, in Hampshire, Boothby Pagnel, Lincolnshire, or Minster, in the Isle of Thanet. All of these are well known instances of the domestic architecture of England in the twelfth century, many of them belonging to the latter part, whilst the present example may perhaps be safely referred to the earlier half of that century. Like most other examples, the principal dwelling rooms appear to have been on the first floor, and the fire-place remains, with Norman shafts in the jambs; the chimney is carried up to the top of the wall, and may have risen above it, with an

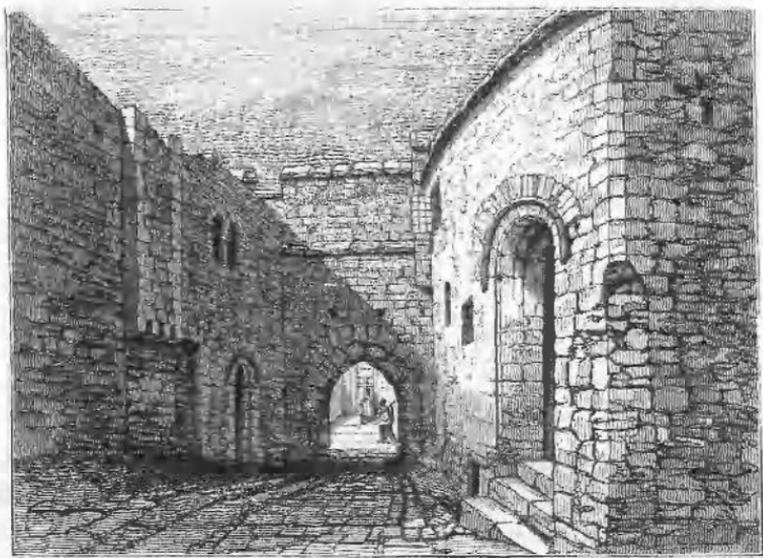


PLAN OF NORMAN HOUSES. With part of the Town Wall, Southampton.
 A. Passage in the wall. C C C. Windows
 B. Fire-place. D. Doorway of the smaller house.

° Rot. Pip. 4 Johan.

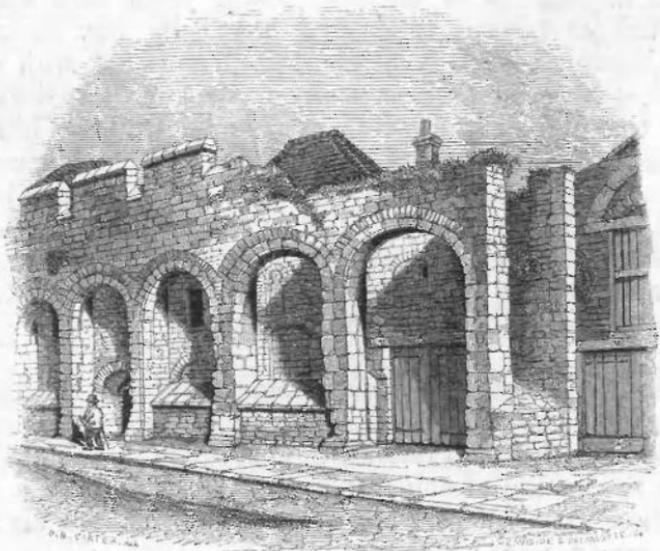


INTERIOR OF A NORMAN HOUSE, SOUTHAMPTON.



EXTERIOR OF NORMAN HOUSES, WITH THE POSTERN GATEWAY.

external projection, like a flat Norman buttress, supported on plain corbels hanging over the lane. The doorway is on the ground floor, and not as in the early houses in the north of England, on the first floor only: no remains of a staircase exist, but it was probably internal and of wood, and may have been carried on the projections opposite to the door. There are no windows in the ground floor, but several on the first story; those which are perfect are of two lights, divided by a shaft, with capital and base. Several of these windows open to the outside of the city wall, which in this part consists of a series of arches carrying the parapet wall and alure; the piers are connected with the wall of the house, but the spaces behind the arches left open, forming a succession of wide machicolations.



PART OF THE TOWN WALL AND NORMAN HOUSE, SOUTHAMPTON.

On the first floor also there is a passage formed in the thickness of the wall, as was usual in fortifications of the period, and this probably communicated with the town wall, though the passage is now partly blocked up.

From the circumstance that the arches of the town wall are built partly over the windows of the house, it is clear that they were erected subsequently, the masonry is also different. Although the arches at this part are round-headed, those adjoining to them are pointed, and evidently of the same period.