



NOTES ON THE MEDIÆVAL ARCHITECTURE
OF CHESTER, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE
TO THE ROWS AND THE CRYPTS.

BY JOHN HEWITT.

THE subjects of my notes are but a small portion of a topic, which, if touched upon in its entirety, would involve the writing of a complete history of mediæval domestic architecture, a task I would leave for others more able than myself. But inasmuch as the immediate subjects are portions of so important a matter, I will trouble you with an outline character of the mediæval buildings and the mode of their erection. Before doing so, I would draw your attention to the fact that our city has neither been built upon one specified line or in any particular period, as was the case with Hull, Winchelsea, and Liverpool, but on and in many, which patching has destroyed many of the features prevalent in each stage of the city's advancement.

The Roman age is far too early for the discussion of our object, except in the general accepted opinion that the lines of our streets are of Roman origin, of which more may be said hereafter. The ravages of the Northumbrians and the Danes in later centuries did much to destroy the Roman work, yet no more than did the Normans, who, with the later inhabitants, left no trace of any Saxon work, excepting

the few interesting head crosses now at St. John's. Thus both Roman and Saxon erections in their turn were ruthlessly thrown down to be superseded by Norman and early English buildings. Yet no Norman architecture has been preserved to us, save in St. John's church, and the Cathedral of St. Werburgh; and so up to the twelfth century, Chester must have been erected at least four times. This must be pointed out as bearing upon the origin of the Rows, as some writers have considered them to have been built during the Roman occupation of Deva. I have yet failed to read of any Roman buildings in England or on the continent having the slightest approach to the features of our Rows. Neither can it be safely contended that Deva should have been built upon other lines than those stereotyped, so to speak, upon the minds of Roman leaders. The remains of that age still preserved for us, as also the writings of our local authorities, confirm this opinion, and so I will dismiss the idea of the Roman origin of the Rows.

I have already very briefly brought up the progress of the city to the Norman age, when the Castle of Chester was erected by William the Conqueror, and the walls repaired and strengthened. This protection from the Welsh and other enemies of the city, together with the powerful character of the Norman earls of Chester, laid the real foundation of Chester as a seat of commerce, a protection in itself sufficient to induce our citizens to lay out money to erect houses of business, even had they been without the charters of privileges given them by the earls. Domestic buildings of the Norman age are extremely scarce in England, not one being in Chester. The general character of the houses was but slightly altered during the first three centuries following the Conquest, and the following description by Mr. Cutts will give an idea of their accommodation :—

“The house of any ordinary citizen had a narrow frontage, and usually presented its gable to the street; very frequently it had a basement story groined, which formed a cellar, and elevated the first floor of the house three or four feet above the level of the street. At Winchelsea, the vaulted basements of three or four of the old houses remain, and show that the entrance to the house was by a short stair alongside the wall; under these stairs was the entrance into the cellar, beside the steps a window to the cellar, and over that the window of the first floor: Here, as was usually the case, the upper part of the house was of wood, and it was roofed with tiles. On the first floor was the shop, and beside it an alley, leading to the back of the house and to a straight stair, which gave access to the building over the shop, which was a hall or common living-room occupying the whole of the first floor. The kitchen was at the back, near the hall, or sometimes the cooking was done in the hall itself. A private stair mounted to the upper floor, which was the sleeping apartment, and probably was often left in one undivided garret; the great roof of the house was a ware-room or storeroom, goods being lifted to it by a crane, which projected from a door in the gable. The town of Cluny possesses some examples, very little modernised, of houses of this description of the twelfth century. Others of the thirteenth century are at St. Antonin, and in the Rue St. Martin, Amiens. Our own country will supply us with abundance of examples of houses, both of timber and stone, of the fifteenth century.

“But it must be admitted that the continental towns very far exceed ours in their antiquarian and artistic interest. In the first place, the period of great commercial prosperity occurred in these countries in the middle ages, and their mediæval towns were in consequence larger and handsomer than ours. In the second place, there has been

no great outburst of prosperity in these countries since, to encourage the pulling down the mediæval houses to make way for modern improvements; while in England our commercial growth, which came later, has had the result of clearing away nearly all of our old town-houses, except in a few old-fashioned places, which were left outside the tide of commercial innovations. In consequence, a walk through some of the towns of Normandy will enable the student and the artist better to realise the picturesque effect of an old English town than any amount of diligence in putting together the fragments of old towns which remain to us."

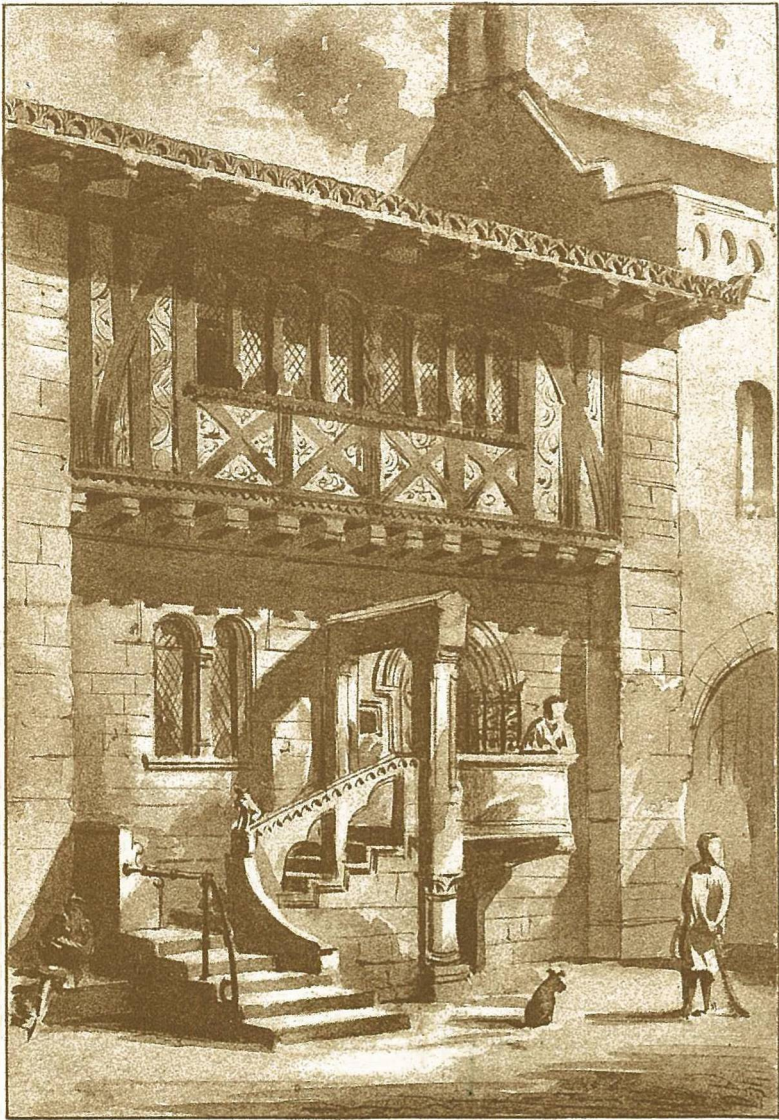
I have ventured to give this extract from *Scenes and Characters of the Middle Ages*, in order to show that, with the exception of the Rows, the buildings of Chester are built very much upon the mediæval plan. Bearing in mind that the basement consisted of a groined vault with low doorway and window, under the external steps leading to the principal floor, elevated four or five feet above the street level, we arrive at the real subjects of to-night's meeting.

During the visit of the Archæological Institute to Chester in 1849, the late Mr. J. H. Parker gave an opinion upon the Rows which I will here repeat, as it contains points of vital interest. He says:—

"Perhaps the one feature for which Chester is most celebrated is the Rows, said to be perfectly unique, and the origin of which is very doubtful. They consist of a passage or bazaar along the front of the first floor of the houses, with only a balustrade in front, the back part of the rooms being the shops. The most probable origin of these Rows is, that after some great fire, it was found more convenient to make the footway on the top of the cellars or vaulted substructures, instead of in the narrow street

between them. It was the custom in towns in the middle ages to protect the lower story or cellar, which was half under ground, by a vault of stone or brick. This was the storeroom, in which the merchandise or other valuable property was preserved. The upper parts of the houses were entirely of wood, and the whole of these being destroyed by fire, it was more easy to make the footway on the top of the vaults, leaving the roadway clear for horses and carts. Many of these vaulted chambers of the mediæval period remain in Chester, more or less perfect, some divided by modern walls and used as cellars, others perfect and used as shops or warehouses. For engravings of these store-rooms, see *The Chester Guide* and *Gentleman's Magazine*, September, 1856, p. 293. A very dreadful fire is said to have occurred in 1114, which consumed a large part of Chester, and which, Bradshaw says, was stopped by the exposure of the relics of St. Werburgh. Others are recorded in 1140 and 1180, and in 1231 it was again burnt by Llewellyn. It is possible that the Rows may have as remote an origin as this; such a custom, once established, would not be easily altered."

I agree with some of Mr. Parker's remarks, but they are suggestive rather than conclusive. It is natural that a casual visitor should express suggestive opinions, especially before those who are born and live upon the scene of inquiry, whose daily occupation make the special features familiar, and give greater facilities for research into local antiquities. If the years of the fires had not been recorded, the theory in connection with those disasters is one, which once advanced, could be better sustained than destroyed, but the fact that they occurred before the erection of any of the crypts is fatal to Mr. Parker's opinion. It is possible that theories of greater probability could be advanced and that a specific reason why the Rows were established



INK-PHOTO, SPRAGUE & CO LONDON.

FRONT OF XIIth. CENTURY HOUSE.

From M. Viollet le Duc's Dictionnaire de l'Architecture Française.

could be given. My own task will be to settle none of these theories, however desirous it is they should be; but I may add it is very improbable that the erection of the Rows was intended as a defence against the Welsh, inasmuch as the military strength of the Castle and the city walls and gates were sufficient to resist any attack from the Welsh borderers.

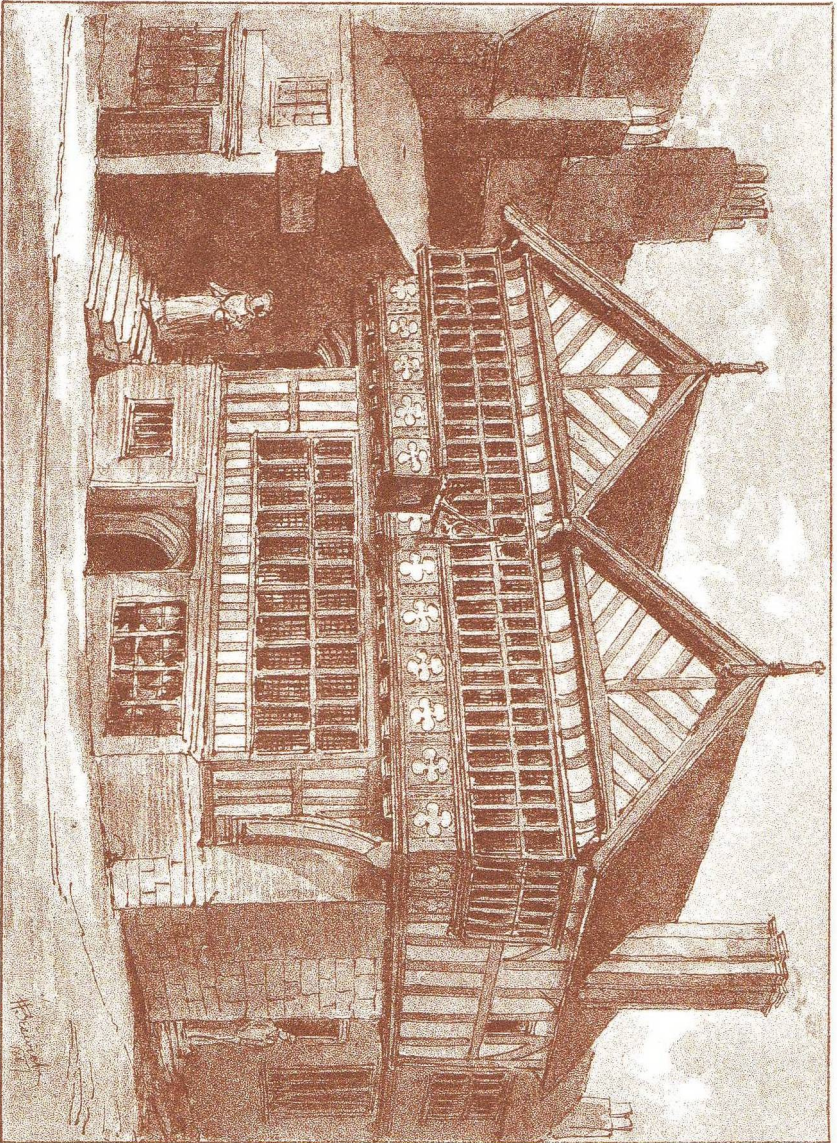
I have been at some pains to find out how I believe the Rows were formed, and will endeavour to give my ideas in detail. Plate No. 1 shows the elevation and frontage of a twelfth-century town house. Here it will be seen that the external steps and the entrance to the cellar are identical, and agree in every particular, with the descriptions already given, and not only so, but also with the existing remains in our city. Taking the frontage of the steps going up to the house level, the real ground frontage to the street gives a depth of about five feet before the main wall of elevation. This area was sometimes open as in the illustrations, but in others may have been inclosed by railings. So far this plan is identical with the crypt yet remaining under the premises of Messrs. Brown, in Eastgate Street. Here still in perfect condition are the entrance and windows with the frontage to the cellar. By leaving out the more modern encroachment built in front of the cellar entrance, the plan would be as shown in the sketch given opposite this page, but whether the steps were returned as in Plate No. 1 or as in the latter there appears no satisfactory evidence. But it is probable that they were on the latter plan, which is yet the case in Chester; excepting flight of steps in Watergate Street near to Puppet Show Entry. The sketch also shows the suggested plan and section of the first floor which contained the business portion of the premises, now represented by our Row level. It is remarkable that the mediæval ideas are the same in the main, proving, though

Chester streets are built upon Roman lines, that a general reformation in the houses must have taken place during the period between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries.

The most complete example of early arrangement in Chester is the Falcon Cocoa House in Lower Bridge Street. Though erected so late as the end of the sixteenth century, it is built upon the lines of a much earlier plan, thus seeming to be a copy of a very much older original, the value of which is enhanced by it being unique in Chester. Here can be seen the identical arrangement of steps, partially external and internal, leading up to the first-floor level, under a massive stone arch, possibly older than the present erection. The entrance to the cellar is modern; but the cellar itself, no longer vaulted, contains large arches to carry the floor by building over. Internally, the kitchen department overlooked a yard at the rear by a large and handsome mullioned window, still existing.

Returning to the street frontage it can easily be seen that advantage has been taken of the space, once devoted to the steps of the adjacent property, by building upon it, and so adding that much depth to the building, which is likewise the case in the premises situate lower down the street. This bringing forward of the frontage had become general in the main streets, though at what period I would not pretend to fix, except that it must have been prior to the sixteenth century.

The Mainwaring family had a town residence in Watergate Street, the site of which is now occupied by the new houses adjoining the premises of Messrs. Blackburn and Co. This building is described by Mr. Thomas Hughes, F.S.A., as "the city residence for generations of the Mainwarings, of Oteley in Salop, and of Bromborough in the county of Chester." . . . "Their stately mansion, with its panelled oak rooms and polished floors; its lady's snug



FALCON INN, CHESTER.

184-1840 PHOTO. SIMMONS & CO. LONDON.

boudoir, stretching out over the steps leading down the street, was ultimately deserted as the family residence, and was let out to strangers as two independent houses. *Peddling little shops . . . were allowed to block up the open space in front* to the sacrifice alike of the character of the mansion, and of its popularity as a place of genteel residence, and then came the end. It passed by sale into the hands of a speculative trader, who speedily tore down the ancient structure, and replaced it with a terrace of modern brick houses of no very ornamental character, and thus has the present generation parted with the Mainwaring House, an architectural landmark that can never be replaced."

Mr. Hughes' regret is well founded, as I find the house had features peculiar to itself, bearing upon the Rows question. The house was set back from line of street, with the peddling little shops of more recent erection before it, as the shops once were before St. Peter's Church under the Pentice Court. But the interior of Mainwaring House was approached by steps, leading up from the street as in older buildings, to an open gallery or covered Row with a balustrade, so formed that the building was entered from the right or left hand at the will of the visitor. This elevated floor and Row proves that the Row principle was not only continuous, but applicable to individual houses. The presence of the small shops proves here (as in other instances) the encroachment upon the streets by the Rows. See illustration opposite page 40.

Following up what has already been said respecting the Eastgate Street crypt, shown on the second plate, I must ask your attention to the remaining portions marked B and C. There will be seen the original steps marked *a*, also the basement *b*, but by the removal of the front wall above the cellar entrance *c*, advancing it to the edge of the external

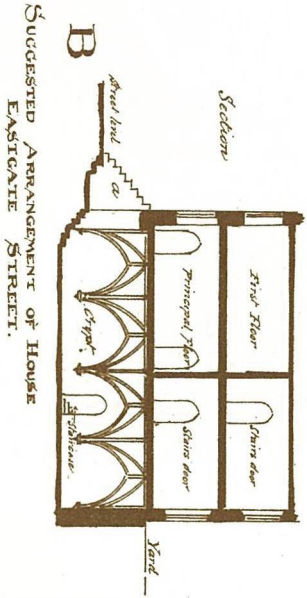
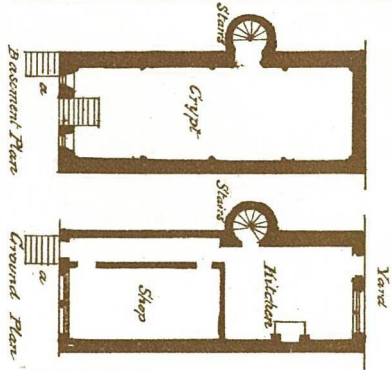
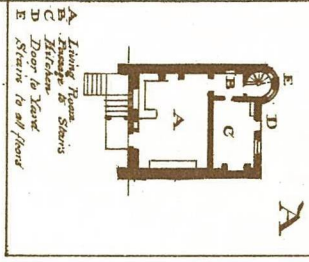
steps at *d*, and erecting the wall *e* over the crypt, the present principle of the Rows is obtained.

I have already stated the probable impossibility of defining when and why the Rows were formed, but it must have been a general undertaking when the idea did present itself. The difference of level between the centre of Eastgate Row South and its Newgate Street extremity corroborates the opinion that their erection is not anterior to that of the crypts, otherwise the altitude would be practically level in the whole length. The effect of this change was the narrowing of all the main streets by at least nine or ten feet, possibly more in the case of Watergate Street, which is narrowed by the total distance between the street and crypt wall, and the width of Row next St. Peter's Church, or about fourteen feet in the whole.

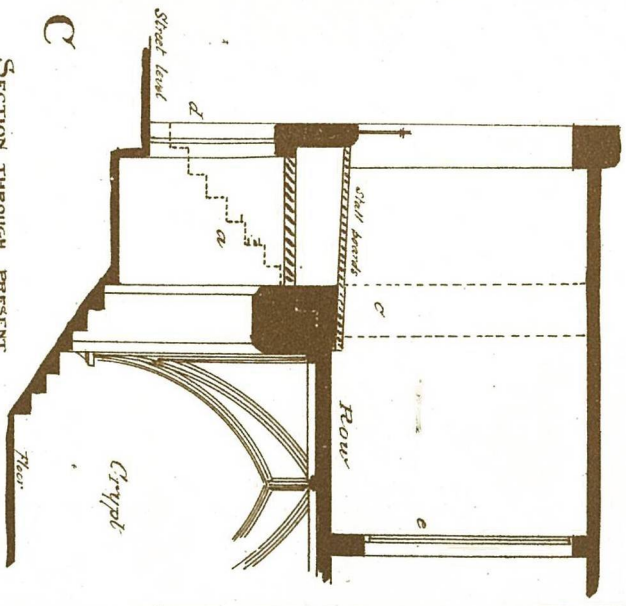
Any one examining the ordnance survey of the city will be struck by the uneven and diminishing width of Watergate Street, as the Cross is approached from the Watergate. No one can suppose that Chester, really the only seaport on the west coast, should have such a miserable approach to its wharfs and its shipping. Even the western extremity of the street is wider than its eastern, and more publicly occupied, end, which was one of the centres of the city. But when the principle of the Row was established, the authorities allowed the street to be built upon, the Row being perhaps a means of compromising the eventual spoiling of Watergate Street.

I am inclined to think that the west side of Bridge Street from the Cross to Commonhall Street, Bridge Street Row East from the Cross to Feathers Lane, the whole of Eastgate Row South, and the projection embracing Mr. Spencer's shop, and others in Eastgate Street North, also that portion of Watergate Street Row South ending at Puppet Show Entry, the North Row of the same street, and

PLAN of
12TH CENTURY HOUSE.



SUGGESTED ARRANGEMENT OF HOUSE
FACIATE STREET.



SECTION THROUGH PRESENT
HOW TO SHOW HOW THE CHANGE
TOOK PLACE.

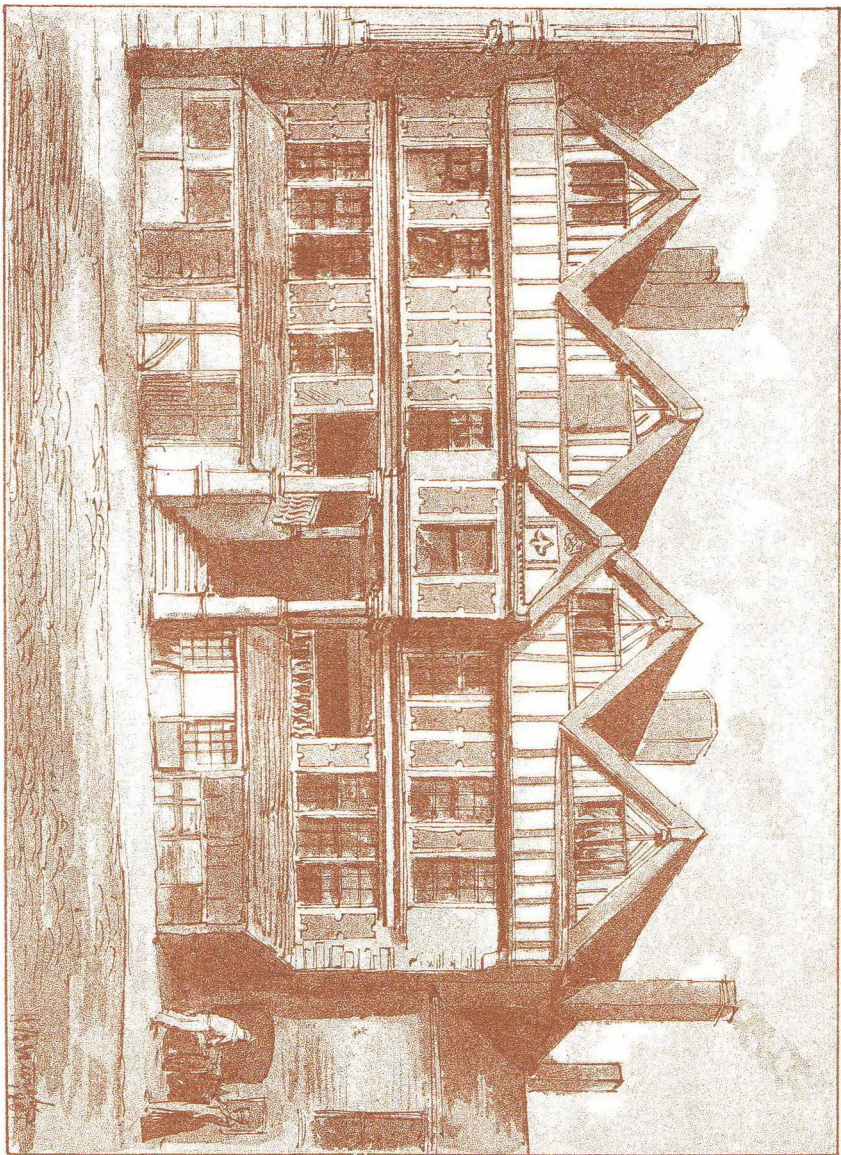
the whole of the Rows in Northgate Street are the earliest portions of the Rows, and encroachments upon the streets; some of the remainder being built within the original line of frontage, as Bridge Street Row West from Commonhall Street to White Friars, and in Watergate Street from Puppet Show Entry to Weaver Street. The portion from Feathers Lane to St. Michael's church, and that from Goss Street to St. Peter's are subject to any inquiries, tending to fix the boundaries of St. Michael's Monastery, and the extent of St. Peter's Churchyard, which may have joined up to Watergate Street, prior to the erection of the Row. At the point of junction of the church of St. Peter's with the Victoria Dining Rooms, it will be found that the remains of a stone wall in a line with the south wall of the church bears evidence sufficient to suggest that this portion of the Row had been added to the street within the last three centuries, the stone wall running into the roof of the house, so as to form a raised portion, exhibiting the suggested older line of frontage, but perhaps I am too sanguine as to this. It has occurred to me that the streets, having been excavated in Roman times and much of the land being above the street level, may possibly have caused a combination of the elevated mediæval house with the existing circumstances, and so originated the Rows; but against this theory is the fact that the doorway of the Eastgate Street crypt proves the contrary, for had the Rows been erected when the crypt was formed, the inner doorway would be of no use, but rather an obstruction.

The historical or social connections of the Rows are of themselves sufficient to form a more interesting paper than I have endeavoured to prepare. There are, however, some points of interest, which seem to be worthy of your attention. Any one turning over the pages of the very inartistic etchings by Batenham, or the spirited etchings of George

Cuitt, will readily see how very much altered the street premises are, and particularly those in Eastgate Street. Many houses of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been swept away from the whole of the streets, and so, if only for the reason that Batenham's etchings give us some idea of their character, his otherwise uninteresting plates have become historically valuable, and worthy of being included in Chester Row lore.

Readers of their city's history are well aware of the trick that Mrs. Mottershead played upon the bearer of the commission to Ireland, during the troubles of the sixteenth century. This took place in the Blue Post Inn, Bridge Street, which premises are now occupied by Mr. James Jones, bootmaker. The present shop is modern, but the remaining front portion of the building internally is of sixteenth-century work. The front room over the Row is called the "card-room," and said to be the identical apartment in which the trick was performed. The ceiling of this room is ornamented by panelled and moulded ribs in plaster work, a large Tudor rose occupies the intersection of the cross beams, and a panelled dado about four feet high is fixed round the walls. The staircase to the second floor is coeval with the other work, but is not of any extraordinary pattern, as it is really a back staircase leading to the attic bedrooms. The front attic is much altered from its original state, being made about six feet less in depth, caused by cutting off the massive overhanging gable, which projected about that distance beyond the Row line. This projection is proved by an ornamental ceiling-centre, a masked face, surrounded by floriated work of the design then in vogue. A view of Bridge Street,¹ taken in the be-

¹ This view is given in *Chester Archaeological Society's Journal*, vol. i., page 109.



MAINWARING HOUSE, CHESTER.
(Now destroyed.)

1846-1847. SPENCER & CO. LONDON.

ginning of the eighteenth century, shows this identical gable, as well as others now removed, and, in the majority of cases, superseded by mean brick erections, entirely at variance with the custom of earlier times, when each tradesman had his premises decorated or ornamented with the sign of his calling or of his house.

Any attempt to restore old Chester to its former artistic and architectural renown will be futile without the introduction of the taste displayed by the manners and customs of her ancient citizens, and possibly no building is more worthy of this revival than the old Blue Post Inn. Nearly opposite this, is the pile of buildings erected in the seventeenth century, in the Dutch style of domestic architecture. They have no recorded history, but their aged and systematic grouping is worthy of being decorated in a manner better to show their beauty than ordinary stone colour can accomplish. There is a very good example of moulded half-timber work bearing "T. C. 1664," behind which is the reputed mediæval crypt chapel; the interior of these premises also bear evidence of considerable taste and finish. The premises more to the north are instances of the excellent knowledge their builders possessed of construction, as they are built upon timber uprights and beams only, no brick piers occurring in a distance of at least fifty feet. The Rows are rather low here in the front, owing doubtless to the raising of the shop fronts below.

In Eastgate Street the only example remaining out of many is the Boot Inn, and that is remarkable for its architecture: whilst opposite to this is a gable bearing the letters and date 16 C+B 10. Northgate Rows have a good type of Gothic in Mr. Rickman's premises, but the best portions of the front are hidden by rough-cast work, which is the case with many other examples in the city.

Watergate Street contains the most examples of older work, a richness due to the street not being sufficiently central, or convenient to be worthy of rebuilding, as was the case of other streets. The first building to notice is "God's Providence House," not so much for its well-known legend, nor its dated and inscribed beam, as for the unsatisfactory manner in which it has been restored. Reading of the admirable manner in which the owner had caused the building to be rebuilt upon the identical lines of the old work, a stranger would naturally expect to see the building an exact copy of the original, but in reality there is not one of the older features retained, saving of course the beam. Despite what has been said in favour of the new God's Providence House, the old one, with its simple but artistic and modest timbers, was much more interesting than the new, with its cast-irony-looking panels and ill-proportioned timbers. A much better subject is the building a little more to the south, occupied by Mr. Maddocks, furniture dealer, where is to be found a variety of timber and plaster work too good to be left neglected.

Bishop Lloyd's House is of itself a subject, and one worthy of the pen of both the artistic and scriptural writer, for, whether for its associations, its artistic merit, or the scriptural scenes depicted on the carved panels, the house is the most important in the city. Next to it should come the now removed "Lamb Row," which was for generations the lion of Chester under the hands of the artists, each of whom saw the dark shadows and streaks of light so important in street painting, which no other scene in Chester could present. Its well-known construction needs no further remarks here, nor need you be reminded of how Randal Holme was fined in 1670 for building over the street, except to confirm what I have said respecting the bringing forward of the houses.

There is an interesting, but incomplete example of mediæval stonework in the premises of Messrs. J. R. Dutton and Sons, consisting of a door arch, and two window openings. They are elevated to the Row level, but at some distance beyond the inner wall of the Row. Possibly these are the remains of a domestic building of the fifteenth century, and, as the massive stone wall runs up to the present roof, there can be no doubt but that it was an external wall when first erected.

It is natural that many of our best buildings should be frequently published; but in an article, which appeared in the *Illustrated English Magazine* for August, 1886, several of the buildings in Chester were depicted as tumbling here and there in the most amusing fashion. Cestrians should object to be so libelled, however artistically it may be. Truth, even in buildings, should not be sacrificed to attain a perhaps better object than the subject, the more so as our older buildings are of sufficient beauty not to need exaggeration.

In the earlier portion of this paper a slight description of the basement is given, a fuller account of which forms the second half of my notes. There can be no doubt that the builders of older Chester had an eye to stability, accommodation, and beauty. Even in the cellars, strange to say the only remnants left to us, these properties were carried out to the fullest extent. The disposition of the cellars are identical with each other, and their floors are about the same relative level. This level would be governed by the drainage of the city, which was perhaps unworthy the taste displayed in the buildings. The thoroughfares at one time had large open channels, by which the surface-water and refuse was conveyed. In the annals of the city several entries are found bearing out this want of proper street accommodation:—

“1503. The pavement from the High Cross to the Eastgate and to St. Michael’s Cross was new laid.”

“1568. This year the Northgate Street, the White Friars Lane, the Parson’s Lane, and the Castle Lane were paved.”

“1579. The Watergate Street was paved from the High Cross to Trinity church.”

“1584. Eastgate Street new paved, and the channel laid in the middle, whereas before it lay on both sides.”

Other entries prove that, in 1636, Wm. Edwards, mayor, “caused many dunghills to be carried away, but the cost and time was on the poor.” Also that “the maior caused the dirt of many foule lanes in Chester to be carried to make a banke to enlarge the Roodey, and let shippes in.” At a subsequent period, when the city was crowded with soldiers, during the siege, the following order was passed by the Council: “That the lord bishop be informed of the unwholesomeness of the puddle near the Eastgate, and the inhabitants be ordered to cleanse the streets before their respective doors within one month, under a fine of ten shillings.” These instances prove that the corporation of three centuries ago were not so energetic in improvements of the thoroughfares as at the present time, always excepting Whipcord Lane and the Boughton approach to Hoole. When the drainage of the city was improved, the cellars became deeper, and eventually became entirely underground.

The crypts of Chester belong to different portions of a period between the accession of Richard I. (1189) and the end of the thirteenth century, during which time early English architecture prevailed, and the decorated style became established. These crypts were connected to the house internally by a flight of steps, mainly on the left-hand side of the building. That in Eastgate Street had circular steps in the left-hand wall, which is the exact position of the straight staircase leading from the Bridge Street crypt, but a variation

occurs in the Watergate Street crypt by its being placed at the extreme end. These variations, however, are of no importance, seeing that every owner was at liberty to suit the planning to his own requirements.

The principal point of interest in these crypts is the architecture and the various methods of vaulting. I have prepared plans showing the growth of this vaulting and the changes which occurred in even a century. Plan No. 2 shows the one in Bridge Street, No. 3 that in Eastgate Street, and No. 4 that in Watergate Street.¹ From these it will be seen that the simple groining ribs and intersecting vaulting with no ribs became furnished with both longitudinal and transverse ribs. The double vaulting to the Watergate Street crypt is now unique in Chester, but it occurred in that demolished in 1861 upon the erection of Messrs. Beckett's premises. In the earlier examples of vaulting there were usually no ribs, except the transverse, which are often perfectly plain and very massive, and even these are not always found, but later specimens commonly have diagonal ribs on the groins, similar to the Bridge Street crypt, which was erected after the use of the pointed arch had been firmly established. The decorated style had additional ribs introduced between the diagonal and cross springers, following the curve of the vault, the ridge of which had the longitudinal rib already named, as shown in the Eastgate Street crypt, and the more important ribs were usually of a larger size than the others. Etchings of the destroyed crypt in Eastgate Street show what seems to be transitional in style, being erected whilst the early English was making way for the decorated style. The columns had no caps to receive the groining ribs, as the latter finished against the splayed sides of the column. At a later period not only were the centre columns provided

¹ These are not illustrated, the numbers referring to cartoon drawings.

with caps, but the wall corbels were extended into half columns with cap and base, of smaller dimensions to, but agreeing with, the main columns, as in the Watergate Street crypt.

There is a curious sinking in the walls of the Eastgate Street crypt, occupying the whole of the first bay, which sets the wall back about three inches. There seems no practical reason why this should have been done, as no trade would need this unexplained set-off. The other features of the crypts will be referred to, and with these general remarks I will describe them individually. Doubtless most of you have become familiar with them, so I have considered it unnecessary to provide cartoon drawings, showing their appearance.

The oldest crypt is situate in Bridge Street, occupied by Mr. Newman. The front wall stands about eighteen yards from the line of the street, and the internal dimensions are, length, forty-two feet six inches, width, fifteen feet three inches, and height, fourteen feet six inches from the present floor line to top of groining ribs. The vaulting is finished with groining, divided into six bays, which are formed by plain splayed ribs springing from semi-coned corbels of plain character, the vaulting consisting of small stones similar to the general work in early English erections. In its original state this crypt would be but ten feet only in full height, with the floor about two feet six inches below the line of street, but at a subsequent date the owners have deepened the apartment some four feet by excavating in the rock, and lowering the floor to its present level. When performing this, to provide access to the staircase, the circular-shaped steps, now in the crypt, were shaped out of the natural rock, which still retains its "life," or moisture. This alteration must have taken place whilst the old staircase was still in use, otherwise the additional steps would

be useless. The staircase, just referred to, consists of stone steps (having stone bulkhead) leading to the kitchen above, the winders at the top having a turn to the right hand, so as to land directly over the crypt. Under one of the steps, now removed, is a cavity twelve inches long, six inches wide, and seven inches deep, evidently formed for the purpose of concealing treasures or money, for the preservation of which the hole has been lined and covered with oak. When discovered, a year or two back, the finder of this was unable to meet with the reward of "treasure trove," so much occupying the attention of officials, with probably little effect, as the aperture was quite empty. This is rather unfortunate, as substantial evidence is yet required to complete the history of even the crypts of Chester. This crypt is lighted by a triple lancet window of bold character, having transom; the jambs and mullions are of massive proportions, having deep splays, and the cill is about two feet above the original floor level. On either side of this window two apertures are formed in the walls, being almost square in height, width, and depth, which were used as cupboards, indications of the hinges being still visible. These cupboards are at such a level, relative to the present floor, as to be useless, having been formed for use prior to the lowering of the crypt floor. The small door to the staircase is an interesting piece of early English work, having a beautiful trefoiled head; the opening is six feet three inches high, and two feet three inches wide, and approached by the subsequently formed circular steps already mentioned. At the east end of the crypt, where the entrance now is, is a stone screen, with doorway, and two windows erected in 1839. This screen forms part of the thicker wall above it, which has a two-centred and chamfered arch, also modern. Though the crypt is damp and dismal now, owing to the extra excavation, its former

state must have been much brighter before the window was obscured by modern work.

There is one point that ought to be mentioned, if only for its curiosity, I had almost said absurdity. The Chester guide books call it a mediæval chapel, I presume on the strength of what has been said before members of this Society. In vol. iii., p. 487, of the *Journal*, we read that "Dr Rock, a learned ecclesiologist, has said it was a mortuary chapel, not for the secret celebration of religious services, but probably a sort of private oratory." At the above reference it is stated that "if they examined it [the crypt] carefully they would find a dais as they entered it from the shop, and which he (Mr. Wynne Ffoulkes) had very little doubt was the foundation of the altar." I have searched for this evidence of the altar, but am convinced that the "dais" is really the top of the excavated rock which was not properly worked down to the line of built wall, when the crypt was deepened. Independent of the present window being at the west end, and therefore entirely unsuited for a religious purpose, it is not probable that two ends would be lighted by windows, nor need even a mediæval chapel be placed at so low a level. The so-called aumbries are only mediæval cupboards, as before named, of a very ordinary pattern prevalent in most crypts. Whilst every reasonable argument is against its religious use, the existing, and neighbouring crypts occupied by Messrs. T. Q. Roberts and Co., and Messrs. Brown and Co., throws some comparative light upon the original intended use of these buildings.

Eastgate Street crypt, situate under Crypt Chambers, is the third earliest vaulted chamber left in Chester, under the Rows. It must have been erected within one hundred years of the completion of the one in Bridge Street. Its proportions are very good, as also is the effect of the groin-

ing ribs. The intermediate cross and the wall ribs add much effect to the view, and altogether a greater artistic feature is attained. The bold groining ribs spring from delicately moulded corbels, and are intersected at the apex by a continuous longitudinal rib. In the east wall is an opening, which once led to the circular staircase, giving access to the principal floor over. The entrance from the street is the best piece of archæological evidence existing in any of the crypts, as it assists to prove any reasonable theory advanced concerning the origin of the Rows. The entrance doorway is not early English and has been altered in no special style or early period, but the two single lancet windows are original, though portions of their arched heads are patched up with cement. The general dimensions of this crypt are, length forty-two feet seven inches, width thirteen feet ten and a half inches, and height thirteen feet.

The crypt in Watergate Street has been illustrated and briefly described in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for July, 1864, p. 73. This brief description contains one glaring error, in saying "the crypt is supposed to have been built by Ranulph de Blondville, sixth Norman Earl of Chester, about the year 1180." It is to be regretted that these suppositions are made without regard to the evidence, and is really equal to asserting that a Queen Victoria florin is supposed to have been struck in the time of George III. For this reason, that the architecture of the Watergate Street crypt is coeval with the death of Henry III., or nearly a century later than 1180. The latter date had not seen the commencement of early English style by nine years; the crypt itself bears evidence of having been erected after the rise of decorated Gothic, but before its full development. It differs from those already described by being double vaulted on columns, and the beauty of proportion is well shown in the view already mentioned. The dimen-

sions are, length, forty-four feet; width, twenty-two feet; height, eleven feet. It is entered from the street end, through two arches formed in the original external wall, and access to the house above was gained by a doorway in the south wall, still remaining and exhibiting a curious tapering in the width of the internal opening. This cellar entrance is called a "supposed communication with Messrs. Powell and Edwards' single crypt in Bridge Street." There are three cupboards in this crypt, one in the south wall, to which one of the hinges yet remains, and two in the second and fourth bays of the south wall. As already named, there are slight indications of decorated Gothic in this cellar; the octagon columns with their stopped bases, also the bases of the wall columns, are evidence of this, and I would place the date of its erection at 1290—1300.

There was an interesting crypt under the premises now occupied by Messrs. Beckett, of Eastgate Row, which is illustrated by a very poor woodcut in vol. ii. of the *Journal*, where at p. 410 the following particulars are recorded:—

"Mr. Wynne Ffoulkes early in the evening announced that, in conformity with a suggestion at the last meeting, the Council of the Society met, and agreed upon a form of memorial to Messrs. Beckett Bros., of Eastgate Row, requesting them to reconsider their determination to remove the very curious and beautiful crypt under their new premises. Mr. Ffoulkes read to the meeting a very civil letter from the Messrs. Beckett, explaining that immediately on receipt of the Council's memorial they sent for their architect from Liverpool, and charged him so to remodel, if possible, to save the crypt. The gentleman referred to, made the necessary examinations, and expressed his opinion that by taking out the panelling he could reduce the keystones to such a level as would save the substructure, but on attempting to carry this plan into effect, arch after

arch gave way, until it was pronounced unsafe to allow any portion to remain, and thus one other splendid relic of old Chester's ancient glory was swept away and destroyed. The Council desired at the same time fully to recognise the great willingness and anxiety evinced by Messrs. Beckett to carry out the wishes of the Society, and they could only lament that the attempt made in such excellent faith had proved such a consummate failure. The crypt, it will be remembered, consisted of a double row of arches, the junctions resting on massive but elegant columns. It is presumed that an arcade ran originally around the inner walls of the crypt, from the fact that on excavating immediately behind the structure, a number of round marble shafts, resembling Purbeck, were lately found lying heaped together in a square stone chamber, the four sides of which were on an inclined plane in a most unusual manner. One of the shafts referred to had been polished under Mr. Pullan's superintendence, and was found to possess a very rich grain."

The *Journal* is silent as to preserving any measured drawings or sketches of this crypt, so that further particulars as to its dimensions and the supposed arcade, also the inclined walls of the stone chamber, would be worthy of record, while as yet the chance remains. The above are the only vaulted cellars left to us, either in existence or description, but there are remains of other cellars which are at least three centuries old. Examples of these are the massive splayed two-centred arches under the old "Blue Posts Inn," and the premises of Messrs. J. R. Dutton and Sons, Bridge Street. These thick arches are too massive to serve the purpose of carrying the floor only, and must have supported the division wall of the older house, since taken down to adopt the premises to a more modern use.

The general character of the Chester crypts is identical

with that of others existing in various towns in England, examples of which may have been studied by some of our members, whose observations will enable them to decide for themselves, for what purposes the crypts of Chester were intended, if they disagree with what I have written. The parallelism between the Chester crypts and others elsewhere is so clear that no further investigation need, I think, be made to prove that in their crypts, past and present, Christians possess beautiful examples of only a general, and not a special character, and that there is no necessity to assume the existence of any domestic crypt-chapels.

