



The Rows of Chester

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THE City of Chester possesses two unique features—its Walls and its Rows. The former have, from time to time, more especially in recent years, formed the topic of many papers and discussions, but it has been far otherwise with the Rows, and although, to use the expressive words of Professor Freeman, they give Chester “a character which is absolutely unique,” very little is to be found relating to them in the Transactions of Archæological Societies. The only special articles upon them I have yet found consist of (1) Mr. Hewitt’s “Notes on the Mediæval Architecture of Chester, with special reference to the Rows and the Crypts,”¹ and (2) “The Rows of Chester,” by the Rev. W. S. Lach-Szyrma.² The principal authority on the subject is, or has been until very lately, the account recorded in Hemingway’s *Chester*,³ published more than sixty years ago, and which summarises the opinions of previous writers. “No one,” remarked Dr. Howson, “has been able to furnish an authentic history of this peculiarity of our city”;⁴ and, probably, an authentic one may not be altogether attainable, but much may be done in this direction.

¹ C. A. J., i., n.s.

² B. Arch. Journal, vol. xlv.

³ *Ibidem*, 385 - 396.

⁴ “Chester as it was,” 39.

Thirty years ago, when examining and recording the extensive Roman remains that were unearthed at the east side of Bridge Street, I was forced to the conclusion that one lesson to be learned from the discovery was that the explanation of the formation of the Rows, as related in the pages of Hemingway's *Chester*, and generally accepted, could not be the correct one.

To describe or to define what the Rows are may be considered as superfluous to Cestrians, but a brief note of the kind is necessary for the information of others interested in the matter. About the year 1700, Bishop Kennett termed them "the galleries, ranges or walking places, raised and covered over, having shops on both sides, along y^e publick streets in Chester."¹ Dr. Howson regarded them as public highways "passing through the front part of the drawing rooms, on the first floor, of a series of houses, the windows being taken out, while the inner part of these drawing rooms are converted into shops; the bedrooms being overhead, and the passengers walking over the rooms of the ground story; these rooms again having been turned into shops."² Two important points respecting them must not be overlooked—(1) that they are wholly confined to the four principal thoroughfares; and (2) that the side streets which join the latter all gradually ascend to the Row level. A few shops yet remain on both sides of some of the Rows; and there are many steps of communication between the latter and the ordinary street. Although highly praised by the majority of writers, a few have not hesitated to condemn them, *e.g.* Andrew Brice (1759), in his *Grand Gazetteer*, p. 319, describes them thus:—"This was once reckon'd the Glory, but is now the Disgrace and Deformity of Chester; for tho' People are effectually kept from Wet, when it

¹ Lansdowne MS., 1039.

² "Chester as it was."

rains, hereby, &c., yet the Houses are hereby lessen'd, whose Fronts would otherwise come out into the Streets as far as those Galleries; and the Shops are all so dark and close that a Stranger riding thro' can see none; and 'tis otherwise very incommodious."

The name by which they are now known probably originated in the circumstance that Chester possessed an unusual number of lines of houses, each of which was designated a Row, the term being subsequently transferred from these lines to the open galleries, of which they formed the inner boundary.¹ As applied to a single line or row of tenements the term was not uncommon in other cities and towns. Shrewsbury, Exeter, and London, had each their Butcher Row.² In Hull there was formerly a Priest-row.³ Sometimes the term is applied to the entire street, as in the case of the narrow lanes of Yarmouth, and formerly at Aberdeen.⁴

The earliest use of the term "Rows," as applicable to Chester, that I have yet found in any printed work, was employed by William Smith, a native of the city, in

¹ This led Major Egerton Leigh to make the facetious suggestion that the motto of the city should be "Sub rosa."

² A row of wooden houses known by this name that stood between St. Clement Danes' Church and the Strand, London, was removed in 1800. The Exeter example is recorded in the following transcript of an advertisement that appeared in *Brice's Weekly Journal* of Sept. 11, 1730:—"Exon. At the House of Thomas Brice, near the Head of the Butcherow, is very good Ale sold for Twopence per Quart, Inn-door or Out-door, for ready Money." In Chester the Butchers formerly occupied Fleshmonger Lane, now Newgate Street.

³ Hull. "A street, or rather a row of houses, twelve in number, which retains the name of Priest-row to this day."—R. Thoresby, *Correspondence*, ii., 98, April 14, 1708.

⁴ "In 1574 it was ordained at . . . a meeting that John Cowper should pass every day in the morning at four hours, and every night at eight hours, through all the *rews* of the town, playing upon the Almony whistle (German flute?) to warn craftsmen of the time."—R. Chambers, *Dom. Annals of Scotland* (1859), i., 129.

According to Halliwell, a Rew in Devonshire is "the shady side of the street."

King's *Vale Royal*. In it he mentions the "galleries, which they call the Roes"; and we have evidence that this was written prior to the year 1590.¹ Although it is customary for authors to affirm that Rows are only to be found in Chester, we must accept their statements with some amount of reservation. At the present time no other examples are to be found in this country; nevertheless a similar arrangement of the streets existed formerly in a few other places. Thus, about the year 1540, Leland recorded the following at Bridgnorth, in Shropshire:—"There is one very fayre Street goinge from North to South, and on each syde this Street the Houses be gathered; soe that Men may passe drye by them if it raine, according to some Streets in Chester Cittye."² And of Kendal in Westmorland Dr. W. Stukeley remarked in 1724, "This town has been built mostly with pent-houses and galleries over them all along the streets, somewhat like Chester."³ According to the modern historian of that town, "these galleries continued till an advanced period of the last century. An aged friend of ours has heard his father relate that he could walk 'dry shod' under the roof of a gallery from New Biggin to Stricklandysh end."⁴

Some foreign examples must not pass unnoticed. Dr. Howson affirmed, "the only remaining example of a true Row to be found elsewhere [than in Chester] is in

¹ W. Smith was Rouge Dragon Pursuivant, and died in 1618. His collections, "made about 1590," came into the possession of Sir R. Crew, Kt., Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench, and were subsequently incorporated by King in his *Vale Royal*.—*Ormerod*, i., 135.

² *Itinerary* (1768-9), iv., 103. It is noteworthy that no account of Chester is included in Leland's work. Vol. 5, folio 53, of the original MS. commences "The Bridge at Chester upon Dee"—nothing more. But as folios 51 and 52 are vacant, they were probably reserved for a description of the city and its surroundings, an intention not carried out by the author.

³ *Itinerarium Curiosum* (1776), ii., 40.

⁴ C. Nicholson, *Annals of Kendal* (1861), 121.

Rome, and in a portion of ancient classical Rome . . . Here, in an obscure corner on the northern side of the Capitol and to the S.E. of the Forum of Trojan, are the upper and lower lines of shops, the covered way for the foot passengers, and the steps leading down at short intervals to the main street."¹ Probably, however, other examples of elevated footways, with one or more rows of shops, may yet be found in some of the oldest portions of Continental towns, unvisited by tourists. One came under my own observation in 1876, when, on rambling about the older parts of Munich, I was surprised to find the whole of the south side of the Marienplatz to be similar in arrangement and construction to the Chester Rows. Ascending by eight or nine steps, and passing under a pointed arch, I entered a narrow footway having a line of shops on either side, with various lateral openings for descent by steps into the street, at which level a third row of shops completed the similarity. The covered footpaths (usually designated as arcades or piazzas) that exist in many of the principal streets of Berne, Bologna, Botzen, Padua, and other Continental towns, and formed by the houses projecting over them, supported by arches, have been called Rows by some writers. The same term has also been applied to colonnaded houses in this country, *e.g.* at Denbigh and Nottingham; but they lack the distinctive character of those of Chester in not being elevated above the main street. They have, however, an important bearing on the history of the formation of the latter. Authors, as represented generally by Hemingway, have traced the origin of the Chester Rows back to the Roman period, and on two distinct data—(1) the formation of the

¹ *Op. cit.*, 38.

streets, (2) the arrangement of the houses. Each of these demands examination.

(1) As to the formation of the streets. It is said by Hemingway that the Romans undertook "the Herculean task of cutting through a rock the whole length of the four streets, and to a depth of from sixteen to twenty feet. . . . The original level of the carriage road at the junction of Watergate and Bridge-streets may be seen by the present height of the Rows in those places. . . . The excavations must have been made in all the streets through the solid rock, as is clearly ascertained from the back parts of the shops and warehouses in different parts, particularly in Bridge-street and Watergate-street."¹ This opinion, in a modified form, was accepted by Mr. Watkin, who affirmed that the streets "were certainly to a considerable extent excavated in the rock";² as well as by Mr. T. Hughes, expressed thus:—"The main streets in the city, . . . at all events at the Cross, were excavations out of the parent rock."³ The emphatic assertion "as an undeniable fact, that the streets and rows were originally on a level,"⁴ has always appeared to me to be a somewhat hasty assumption, especially when we recognise the question of the original ground-level to be the key-note of any explanation of the great peculiarity of Chester. Although our data are very imperfect, we are possessed of a sufficient number of facts to enable us to form a proximate opinion. The original *Castrum* of the Romans—the foundation site of the present city—was situated on a gentle slope, beyond the boundaries of which, on the south and west sides,

¹ *Op. cit.*, i., 392, 4, 5. Dr. Howson suggested "the Roman ways to have been cut deep in the soft sand-stone, leaving square spaces of table-land on which it would be convenient to build houses."—*Op. cit.*, 39.

² *Roman Cheshire* (1886), 114. ³ *Chester Arch. Journal* III., 484.

⁴ Hemingway, i., 393.

the descending gradients were much steeper. Within this primary enclosure, the Roman *prætorium* (represented generally by the site on which stands St. Peter's Church) occupied the central, and, in all probability, the highest ground,¹ indications of which are not altogether wanting at the present date. 1. From the Cross there is a gradual fall in the street-levels towards the east, west, and south, about an equal distance each way. 2. Although there is a gradual rise of the street-gradient to the north, the *prætorium* site was probably on a small knoll or eminence; and the fact of the sandstone rock approaching the surface in the vicinity of the latter favours the supposition.² 3. The rising ground at the Cross was probably due to the cropping out of the sandstone strata, favoured by their inclinations being from eight degrees to ten degrees east.³ 4. The evidence that a short distance from the centre of the city the rock surface is near the level of the street and not of the row. From these data we can more readily understand that the original central eminence was excavated sufficiently to ensure the street-gradients from north to south being made as easy as possible. This excavation, being limited to a small area, was a very different affair from the deep cuttings required in the construction of the four principal streets, as asserted by the authorities already quoted.⁴ With this exception the discoveries of

¹ Mr. Wynne Ffoulkes in *Chester Arch. Journal* III., 488. The proximate boundaries of the original *Castrum* are shown in a map in Mr. Watkin's work, facing p. 86.

² cf. Hemingway, 395. In addition to the statement of Mr. T. Hughes already quoted, he informed me during a conversation on the subject, that his remark, "he had seen himself, on the Row level, immediately behind some of the shops, the rock *in situ*" (*Journal* III., 484), applied to the vicinity of the Cross.

³ Information of Mr. T. Shephard.

⁴ The only other part where the main roadway shows signs of having been excavated is in Lower Bridge Street (at some distance beyond the limits of the original *Castrum*), where the ledges of rock were cut through in forming the roadway to the river bank.

recent years have served to show that the main streets were not cut out of the rock, but are almost identical with that of the original ground-level during the Roman period, and that the higher portions, represented by the level of the Rows, have been formed by the gradual accumulation during many centuries of rubbish. The Roman structures uncovered in Pierpoint Lane in 1858, and on the east side of Bridge Street in 1863,¹ demonstrate the correctness of this statement; and it has recently received additional confirmation from the discovery of the base of a Roman pillar *in situ* at the back of a house in Watergate Street (south side), the fourth eastward of the one known as Bishop Lloyd's, the level of which is almost identical with that of the street itself, from which the pillar is distant 57 feet.² From an examination of these points we arrive at the conclusion that the formation of the Roman streets was, as a rule, not excavated, and had nothing to do with the formation of the Rows.

We pass on to consider (2) whether the arrangement of the houses of that period was a cause of the peculiarity; and the sole object of the Rev. W. S. Lach-Szyrma, in his paper on the subject, to which allusion has already been made, was apparently to prove that it was. In it he asserts that "Roman Chester was almost certainly a city of porticos and piazzas inside the fortress walls; and that when the Romans left England, many of these old

¹ *Journal III.*, plates facing pp. 15, 106, with accompanying text.

² The foregoing remarks upon the street-levels apply to them as a whole. No doubt many minor changes have taken place in them at different periods, even during the 320 years of the Roman occupation, especially in filling up hollows, making easier gradients, &c. Outside the Eastgate, Roman pavement has been found at two different depths below the surface (Watkin, *Op. cit.*, 112 - 13), indicating that the roadway from the Cross eastward was originally much steeper than it is now. The difference in the heights of the Rows on the two sides of Northgate Street does not prove the high level theory.

buildings remained," and although "they passed away and crumbled in the lapse of ages, they may have formed the ideal on which later architects worked with details of mediæval work."¹ The earliest author who suggested the Rows to be an emanation of this early period was Dr. W. Stukeley, who stated (since 1724) "the rows or piazzas are singular, through the whole town giving shelter to foot people. I fancied it a remain of the Roman porticos;"² and "undoubtedly continued in a manner from the Roman times."³ Pennant went a step further in regarding them "to have been the same with the ancient vestibules; and to have been a form of building preserved from the time that the city was possessed by the Romans. They were built before the doors, midway between the streets and the houses, and were the places where dependents waited for the coming out of their patrons. . . . The shops beneath the rows were the cryptæ and apothecæ, magazines for the various necessaries of the owners of the houses."⁴ To support his view he quoted from the writings of Plautus. Then we have Hemingway affirming "there is good reason to believe that the first dwellings of the Romans occupied precisely the same site as the houses and shops in the rows now do, with the balustrades or openings in front of them."⁵ Both Mr. Ayrton⁶ and Mr. T. Hughes⁷ favoured the Roman origin. The excavations at Wroxeter, and on many other sites, have exhibited no traces of the open vestibules described by Pennant, nor is it probable that the Romans adopted them to any extent in Britain. On the contrary, owing to the rigorous and variable climate, their buildings in this country were enclosed, and great

¹ Op. cit., 361.

² Op. cit., i., 59.

³ Ibid, ii., 31.

⁴ Tour in Wales (1778), i., 108-9.

⁵ Op. cit., i., 393.

⁶ Journal III., 480.

⁷ Strangers' Handbook to Chester (1856), 45.

attention was paid to the plan of heating the apartments. Moreover, we must not forget that Deva was one of the most important military colonies, and therefore less likely to have buildings of such a refined character as, for example, would be found in Bath and its neighbourhood. Their houses in this country had a ground floor and no upper storey; no indications of a staircase have ever been found,¹ nor any structures answering to these "cryptæ and apothecæ" of Pennant, nor any places below this ground floor, excepting the hypocausts and præfurnia.

It is difficult to understand how the Roman ideal could have been the parent of the Row. The city fell into the hands of Æthelfrith in the year 607,² when he defeated the Welsh in a great battle under the walls of Chester, and left the place a heap of ruins. "The desolation of Chester," remarked Freeman, "lasted exactly three hundred years," and the place "passed for a while into the condition of a mighty and mysterious monument of past times."³ Pennant's statements were evidently based on the assumption of the occupation of Deva having been continuous, as in the instance of Exeter; but such was not the case. The destruction, and subsequent desolation of three centuries, had probably swept away all traces of the ideal of a Roman house. While Mr. Watkin significantly remarks that the Rows, "even in their earliest form, did not exist in Roman times,"⁴ he makes no allusion to the probable structural arrangements of the Roman dwellings in Deva. No one has paid more attention to this subject than Mr. Hewitt, and he dismisses

¹ Vide T. Wright's "Uriconium" (1872), 211.

² Freeman gives this date, but, according to S. R. Gardiner, it was in 613 "Student's History of England" (1892), 43. The "Anglo-Saxon Chronicle" agrees with the former.

³ English Towns, &c. (1883), 232-3.

⁴ Op. cit., 114.

“the idea of the Roman origin of the Rows”;¹ and this is the corollary of the remarks upon the houses of Deva of that period.

Chester was refounded in the year 907 by Æthelfleda, “the Lady of the Mercians,” but the history of the later period of its Saxon occupation throws no light whatever either upon the general character of the ordinary dwellings or of the Rows;² but we approach within more measurable distance of the origin of the latter with the advent of the Normans in the 11th century. Although “of the domestic architecture of England before the Normans we really know nothing,”³ there are many reasons for believing the houses to have been mainly constructed of timber, with lath and plaster (or wattle and daub, or with cob), having roofs of thatch, both before the Conquest and long afterwards, being modified by many local circumstances.⁴ Even in London,

¹ *Journal I.*, n.s., 31.

² Mr. T. Hughes read a paper to the members of this Society, “On some Anglo-Saxon coins discovered in the foundations of St. John’s Church, Chester, in the year 1862.” (*Journal II.*, 289-308.) He was of opinion they were deposited at the time the original church was founded, and had escaped discovery when the Norman edifice was erected. All the coins were of the reign of Edward the Elder (901-925), and the time of the foundation of the church was believed to be between 907 and 911, very soon after the re-occupation of the city by Æthelfleda. Attention was especially directed to one of the coins containing the representation of a Saxon house “of three or four stories, the second bearing . . . a notable resemblance to our Chester Rows, with the front to the street supported upon arches, as is still the case in several instances around us.” (*Ibid.*, 297-8, and No. 4 in plate facing 289.) To others, and certainly to myself, it appears rather to represent a tower, probably of a church. If struck at Chester, the object represented would have been of especial interest, but the city had no mint until near the close of that century.

³ Freeman, “Norman Conquest,” v., 644.

⁴ Mr. T. Hughes was of opinion that the house at the corner of Duke Street, in Lower Bridge Street (shown in No. 12 of Batenham’s etchings, published in 1880, ed. by T. Hughes), “stood on Norman foundations,” but this is very doubtful, especially as at the time of the erection of the Castle a large number of houses in the vicinity were destroyed and their available materials used.

“at all events in the reign of King Stephen, the great majority of the London houses were wholly built of wood, and thatched with straw, reeds, or stubble”; but, after a great fire there in 1136, some of the richer citizens built them of stone and roofed them with tiles. In an Assize known as Fitz-Alwyne’s, of 1 Richard I. (1189)—the earliest English Building Act—and as an encouragement to others to build in a similar manner, to prevent the spread of fire, certain privileges were granted.¹ Mr. T. Wright has shown from an examination of the *Fabliaux*—the popular metrical tales of the 13th century—that “the dwellings of the peasantry and bourgeoisie” were very poorly constructed.²

With the rise of the better class of traders sprung up also houses of better construction, especially with respect to the preservation of their goods from the frequent fires that occurred in towns and cities. The general arrangements were very simple. The living apartment or solar was raised several feet above the ground-level, and was approached by a flight of steps. Above this was the sleeping chamber. The kitchen and offices were in the rear, while below was the cellar, with an entrance in front for goods and a staircase of access to the floor above.³ This was probably the general plan of a Chester tradesman’s house for several centuries, beginning with the latter end of the 12th or commencement of the 13th. The cellar was a stone vault rising to the height of three, four, or more feet above the ground-level, being governed by the elevation of the floor of the living chamber; while the

¹ Intro. to “Liber Albus,” H. T. Riley (1859), xxix.

² “Journal of Archæol. Inst. i.” (1845), 212 - 221; cf. J. Britton, “Archit. Antiq.” ii. (1835), 93.

³ cf. T. Wright, “History of Domestic Manners” (1862), 83 - 84; Rev. E. L. Cutts, “Scenes, &c., of the Middle Ages” (1872), 534 - 5.

entire superstructure was of wood-framing filled in with daub, and at a later period with bricks. "At the time of the promulgation of Fitz-Alwyne's Assize (1189) . . . the houses in London consisted of but one storey over the ground-floor, and no more."¹ One of the illustrations of Mr. Hewitt's paper² is of a 12th century house, similar in general arrangements to those above recorded, but it represents one of far better class than those erected in Chester. Taken from Viollet le Duc's beautiful work on French architecture, it is not only ornate, but is built of stone up to the sleeping chamber, with side walls of the same material. Freeman has specially noted, that "the practice of building in stone was less familiar in England than it was on the mainland."³ The store rooms for grain and domestic articles generally were customarily placed in the angle of the gabled roof, of which one example yet remains in Chester, at the "Bear and Billet" house in Lower Bridge Street, where the opening (usually closed by shutters) may yet be seen, through which goods were received from the street. They may frequently be noticed in old houses on the Continent. Lucerne possesses many, with a cat-head or small crane for drawing up the articles.

As the stone vaults or crypt cellars have an important bearing upon the formation of the Rows, they demand something more than a passing notice. Some of them were regarded as chapels, but they are now generally recognised to have been constructed for storing merchandise of all kinds, as a protection from fire and thieves.⁴ Although stone chambers, sunk partly below the ground level, were common in churches, monastic and baronial buildings, during the early Norman period,

¹ H. T. Riley, *op. cit.*, xxxi.

² Journal I., N.S., facing 35.

³ Norman Conquest V., 645.

⁴ cf. Journal III., 483, 7, 8.

we have no information that they formed any portion of a merchant's or private dwelling; nor, from what has already been noted, is it probable that the ordinary houses of this and the preceding period possessed such structures. Mr. Riley notes that "cellars are not mentioned in the Assize (Fitz-Alwyne's of 1189); but we find them noticed, and that, too, as places used for business, as early as the first half of the reign of Henry III." (1216—1272).¹ In another work by the same author is printed the specification for building a house in London, in the year 1308, for a pelturer (skinner), in which are mentioned "two enclosures or cellars, opposite to each other, beneath the hall."²

These vaulted cellars were common in all the large English towns; and London, Shrewsbury, Oxford, and Winchelsea possessed (or did until recently possess) examples of them. In the last-named place "many . . . of the fourteenth century remain perfect"; and of two original houses, "the vault of the cellar is three or four feet above the level of the ground."³

Directing our attention to Chester, we find several of these vaulted structures rising three to five or more feet above the ground-level (and records of others that have been destroyed) along the south side of Eastgate and Watergate Streets, and the west side of Bridge Street.⁴ They are situated at various distances back from the line of the street. All, perhaps with one exception, apparently were connected directly with the street, beneath the elevated footpath of the Rows. "Their

¹ *Op. cit.*, xxxii. ² *Memorials of London, 1276—1419* (1868) 65, 66.

³ Turner and Parker's "Domestic Architecture in England," (1859), ii., 162, 3, 185. A good example situated below Gerard's Hall, London, was swept away a few years since as being in the way of some modern improvements.

⁴ The fullest and best description of them is contained in Mr. Hewitt's paper. Several others have been discovered since that was published.

floors are about the same relative level,"¹ and in all instances are formed in the solid rock. Upon this Pennant evidently based his statement that "the streets were once considerably deeper, as is apparent from the shops, whose floors lie far below the present pavement."² The earliest structure of this kind in Chester is the well-known example in Bridge Street, and on the authority of Mr. Parker, "it is clearly work of the thirteenth century."³ Mr. Hewitt is rather of opinion that it was somewhat earlier, as he assigns all the local examples "to different portions of a period between the accession of Richard I. (1189) and the end of the thirteenth century."⁴ They appear to me to range between the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries. Be this, however, as it may, it is certain that the buildings now erected over them are of later date by several centuries. It is very doubtful whether any of the superstructures are earlier than the first portion of the 17th. Stanley House is probably the only one remaining in the city that can be assigned to the preceding one. Notwithstanding the frequency of fires in London, it does not appear that the citizens took any great pains to erect strong places for their goods until after the devastating fire that lasted for ten days, in the year 1212.⁵ Nor were similar safeguards for merchandise provided in Chester, until after the bitter experience taught the inhabitants by the great fires of 1114, 1140, and 1180.

We pass on to consider another point affecting the origin of the Rows. In all towns and collections of houses erected over the sites of Roman ones, the ground level has gradually been raised, owing to the slow accumulation of rubbish of all kinds. Less, however, in

¹ Hewitt, *Op. cit.*, 43. ² *Op. cit.*, i., 109.

³ "Gentleman's Magazine" for Sept., 1856, 293. ⁴ *Op. cit.*, 44.

⁵ Vide "Liber Custumarum," ed. H. T. Riley (1860), 86-88.

the instance of places like Wroxeter and Silchester, where but few buildings have been erected at a subsequent period. In London, while the average depth is about 15 feet, it has been found to vary from 4 feet in Bucklersbury, to 19ft. 6in. on the site of the former East India House in Leadenhall Street.¹ At Bath the depth varies from 9½ft. to 15ft.² At Chester, the excavations made in 1863 in Bridge Street furnished a good example of the progressive accumulation of débris, the greatest depth of which was 14½ft.³ Three feet six inches below the Row level, the remains of a mediæval tiled floor were discovered in 1850⁴; and in White Friars, in 1884, a circular one at a depth of 3 feet.⁵ The cause of such accumulation is not far to seek. Commencing with the firing and destruction of the city by the Pagan Saxons in the 7th century, we have the 300 years of desolation, when the ruins above the surface were crumbling away; followed by the action of the Saxons, Danes, and Normans, in their search for and appropriation of building materials, in which the last-named were especially active.⁶ Then we have the repeated fires, the mediæval

¹ J. E. Price, "Description of Roman Pavement found in Bucklersbury" (1870), 17 - 23; cf. C. R. Smith, "Retrospections," ii., (1886), 197; and "Journal British Arch. Association," ii., 273.

² Scarth's "Roman Bath" (1864), 14 - 15, 89, 136.

³ A section is shown in plan in Journal III., 15, and in Watkin's work, 134.

⁴ Journal I., 51 - 54.

⁵ Watkin, *Op. cit.*, 148. The elevation of the Rows adjoining the Churches of St. Peter and St. Michael, whose floors are at a much lower level, afford some indication of the amount of raising of the level since the erection of those edifices.

⁶ The destruction of so many houses that took place at the time of the erection of the Castle in the 11th century must have added largely to the rubbish. According to Domesday Book:—"When Hugh received it [the City of Chester], it was not worth more than xxx. pounds, for it was greatly wasted, there being then cv. houses less than there were in King Edward's time," when "ccccxxi. houses were rateable in the city itself." *Trans. by W. Beaumont* (1863), 3 - 5.

defiance of sanitary laws,¹ the siege during the civil war, and building operations ever going on. All these had their share in raising the general ground level of the city, excepting (and this is the important point for our present purpose) in the four main roadways.

Based mainly upon the foregoing data, we may now consider the various views relating to the origin, formation, and uses of the Rows, and although these points are distinct from each other, yet they are so intimately connected that, for the sake of convenience, they may be treated of simultaneously.

1. Their Roman origin has already been fully considered, and although Hemingway asserts "that we owe their existence to Roman art and industry," and excludes all other later causes,² yet for the reasons given they cannot be assigned to the Roman period.

2. At the commencement of the 17th century, Mr. Webb affirmed that the original inhabitants "partly won their habitations out of the very hard rock, and partly, by their own industrious building artificially with stone, they made their chiefest abodes rather under than even with the upper face of the earth;" and subsequently "set their new additions upon the former foundations;" and he cites a statement of Archdeacon Rogers in support.³ In this Webb accepts the present street level as the original one, and the earliest dwellings described by him answer to the present crypts and cellars, over

¹ "I never understood so well the manner in which the streets of our old towns became so rapidly raised above the original level till I found in a record of the fifteenth century, at Canterbury, a person presented to the court as having emptied three waggon loads of horse-muck into the public streets." Early in the same century "an inhabitant of Winchester is presented by the jury as having thrown into the middle of the street a dead horse." *Journ. Brit. Arch. Assoc., Winchester Congress* (1846), 24, cf. Hewitt, *op. cit.*, 44.

² *Op. cit.*, i., 395-7.

³ Quoted from King's "Vale Royal" (1656), in Ormerod's "Cheshire," i. (1882), 186-7.

which the galleried rows were erected.¹ He, however, omits all reference to the probable period; but as, in the quotation from Rogers' writings, the Rows are assigned to a period "far before Wales was subdued," it was prior to 1283.

3. The following passage is quoted by Ormerod from the last-named author. "In those times [before 1283], many of the inhabitants of the city did build rows and walks before their houses, that thereby, when the enemy entered, they might avoid the danger of the horsemen, and might annoy their enemies as they passed through the streets."² Archdeacon Rogers was probably the first author to whom we owe this explanation, which dates back to about the middle of the 16th century.³ It was accepted by Hanshall as correct. He remarked that the Rows "were originally erected for the purposes of defence is pretty obvious . . . when the neighbouring Welsh made inroads on the city, when the inhabitants beat back their assailants from these galleries."⁴ It was also deemed satisfactory by Ormerod.⁵ A modern author has made a considerable advance upon this suggestion:—"These rows . . . were originally built for the security of the wares of the principal merchants against the Welsh. Should the mountaineers break into the town, as they frequently did, they might rifle some of the common shops, where their booty would be slight, but those which contained the more costly articles would

¹ Hemingway evidently misconstrued the tenor of these remarks, for after alluding to "the sunken line of the streets," he goes on to say that both Webb and Rogers "favour the notion, that the rows were constructed *after* the level of the streets was formed" Op. cit., i., 391-2. Webb makes no allusion to the streets being sunk at all.

² Op. cit., i., 187.

³ He died in 1595, when Rector of Gawsworth. A brief account of him will be found in Earwaker's "East Cheshire," ii. (1880), 588-9.

⁴ History of Chester (1817), 286-7. ⁵ Op. cit., i., 368.

be beyond their reach ; for at the first alarm the doors of the passages, up which the stairs led, would be closed, and all access to the upper streets cut off, from the open arches of which missiles of all kinds, kept ready for such occasions, could be discharged upon the intruders, who would be soon glad to beat a retreat."¹ In this account the author has allowed too much play to his imagination. There is scarcely a sentence in it that agrees with the facts as far as they are at present known. The Welsh approached Chester in 1256, and burnt Handbridge, but there is no record of their having penetrated within the gates of the city, and if they had succeeded the Rows would have afforded but slender protection. To this suggestion Hemingway was directly opposed, and termed it "puerile";² and I cordially agree with him.

4. According to Hemingway, some have stated "they were erected with a view to the accommodation of citizens and traders, by sheltering them and their goods from the summer's heat and winter's storm."³ I have not discovered a passage in any author which bears this interpretation ; but that they were of great service to both buyers and sellers at all times no one will gainsay. It is noted in Lysons' work that they were "let out advantageously to other tradesmen, particularly during the fairs";⁴ and that on the west side of Upper Bridge Street was known as Scotch Row, from being occupied by the traders of that nation for the exhibition and sale of their woollen goods during the privileged time. They were also well adapted for viewing pageants, processions, &c.

5. In Turner and Parker's *Domestic Architecture*, allusion is made, under the heading of the 15th century,

¹ G. Borrow, "Wild Wales" (1868), 6.

² Op. cit., i., 396; cf. Hewitt, Op. cit., 35. ³ I., 396. ⁴ Op. cit., 610.

to the destruction by fire of the timber structures over the stone vaults, and then follows:—"Possibly the celebrated Rows owe their origin to this circumstance: In rebuilding the town after a great fire, it was found more convenient to make a footway and a sort of bazaar for shops upon the top of the vaults of the cellars, and by taking a passage out of the solaris [the room immediately over the vault], than in the narrow roadway below, where the cellars would not generally make convenient shops."¹ The important elements in this suggestion comprise (1) the formation of the footways over the vaults; (2) their construction by taking a passage out of the fronts of the first storey of the houses. Both of these points will be considered presently; meanwhile it may be remarked that in 1810 Lysons' *Cheshire* contains this passage—"the general appearance of these rows is as if the first stories in front of all the houses had been laid open, and made to communicate with each other." (610.)

6. Dr. Howson made a three-fold suggestion—(1) the Roman one already described; (2) "that this arrangement was afterwards found conducive to safety during the inroads of the Welsh;" and (3) "that vaulted substructures under the footways would be very advantageous in case of the fires, which were frequent during the Middle Ages." By the combination of these, he thought "the peculiarity would be sufficiently explained."² Of these the third is the only one of any present importance.

7. The views of Mr. Hewitt as to the Row-construction, are very fully expressed in his paper published in the *Journal* (I. N.S.), and to which many references have already been made. In the main, they may be regarded as a further development of the idea described in section 5, in the quotation from the work on *Domestic Architec-*

¹ *Ibid* (1859), 34.

² *Op. cit.*, 39.

ture. The most important portions of his paper relate—(1) to the formation of the Row not being “anterior to that of the crypts”; (2) to the crypts affecting the height of the Row; (3) to the advancement of the earlier fronts of the houses towards the street; (4) to the removal of the original front walls of the houses on the first storey, back to their present position in the Row. The entire width of the Row being formed in two portions—the space derived from the house (4) forming the footway; and that from the projected part constituting the bulk head of the shop or stores below (3). In his opinion, the advancement of the houses enclosed the private steps of approach to them, and that when a portion of the solar was converted into the Row pathway, the steps were also given up to the public, previous to which no elevated pathway could have existed.

8. My own views on this subject differ greatly from those held by others who have written upon it. Subject to the reasons and exceptions already detailed, I believe that the present four main roadways represent, as a whole, the original level of the whole of the ground during the Roman period. Further, that the present Rows owe their peculiar construction to two separate causes:—1st, to the elevation of the site occupied by them; and 2nd, to the character of the buildings. No explanation that I have seen alludes to the original existence of these footways simultaneously with the early formation of the streets. The one that finds general acceptance as to their first formation is, that they were constructed through the first floors of the houses, each inhabitant surrendering to the public good the best portion of the best room in his house. (Vide sections 5 and 7.) Apart from the improbability and unsatisfactory nature of this state-

ment, it has no basis either of history or tradition. There are reasonable grounds for assuming that these ways existed from an early period, and that their incorporation into the present Rows was a gradual process, coincident with the slow elevation of the ground (in which the main roadways did not participate); and that those crypts which extend beneath them were one of the consequences of such elevation, and not the cause of it. It may here be noted that only three of these vaulted structures—two in Eastgate and one in Watergate Streets—extend beneath and help to support the footways; the remainder are situated further back from the main street.

We may now consider the origin and character of the buildings lining these footways. From a very early period, a large proportion of the houses erected in towns possessed one feature in common, viz., the projection of one or more storeys beyond that of the ground one, and which was much facilitated by the comparatively light character of the superstructure. Of these there were two kinds—

- I. Those projections which were, in a measure, self-supporting.
- II. Those which advanced so far from the ground floor as to require props, customarily of timber.¹

i. In the majority of large towns, *e.g.*, London and Exeter, the first plan was adopted, and was one evidently well suited to the narrow streets. If there was insufficient head room under the first storey, much inconvenience might result, hence we can understand the

¹ cf. "Observations on Ancient Timber Houses in England," by J. A. Repton, "Journal British Arch. Association VII.," 97 - 107.

promulgation of the following order in the City of London in the time of Edward I. (close of 13th century):—

“That the penthouses and jettées [the storeys that jut out] of houses shall be so high that folks on horseback may ride beneath them. And that they shall be at the height of nine feet, at the very least Under a penalty of forty shillings unto the use of the Sheriffs.”¹

II. The second kind is very frequent on the Continent, where they form continuous arcades or piazzas, and are built of stone or brick. To these allusion has already been made. They are rare in England. London is destitute of any; Exeter has one—the Guildhall in the High Street. There is an excellent example in Dartmouth—the Butterwalk. Many yet remain on both sides of Eastgate Street, Totnes; and on market and fair days, prior to the erection of the present Market, all butter and poultry were sold under these colonnades.²

“Totnes is the Chester of Devon . . . the most interesting [of its architectural remains] . . . are the rows, or as they are here called, the piazzas.”³ In every instance the ground so roofed over forms the ordinary footway.

Turning to Chester, the etchings of Batenham show that, at the commencement of this century, many more houses with simple projections were to be seen than is the case at present, although several yet remain. They vary from the slight advancement of the upper storeys of the “Bear and Billet” and “Falcon” in Lower Bridge Street, to the more marked form in the “Edgar”

¹ H. T. Riley, Transl. of “Liber Albus” (1861), 237.

² Mr. E. Windeatt, of Totnes, informs me that the right on these occasions to sit outside and sell goods did not necessarily go with the house, but frequently belonged to a different person. In one deed examined by him, “the right was bought off from the outsider, who sold it for about £10.” Something of this kind, I am informed, holds good in respect of the bulkheads in some portions of the Chester Rows.

³ Mr. J. Hine in Trans. of Devon. Assoc., ix. (1877), 158.

Tavern in the same street, and in the "Yacht" Inn in Watergate Street. The best example will be found at a house near the corner of Eastgate and Northgate Streets; here the pavement is 7 feet wide, and is overhung for 5 feet 9 inches by the first storey, and about 16 inches by



the second. The second kind, where the projection receives extra support (termed, for convenience, colonnaded), may be regarded as one of the specialities of the city. On the south side of Foregate Street (between Love Street and the "Nag's Head" Coffee House) are

three single houses of the 17th century, whose first storeys project over the footways about ten feet. The large joists which carry their floors are laid upon transverse beams, and these in turn are upheld by massive pillars of oak (three to each house), having side struts.



On the opposite side, and extending much further eastward, are a number of houses covering the footways in a similar manner, but the majority are more modern than those just noticed, having more substantial supports. These probably replaced those depicted in two of Cuitt's

etchings as having existed there in the early part of this century; their general character, with their advanced fronts propped up by wooden uprights, being similar to those on the south side.¹ These colonnaded houses are termed rows by Hanshall, and are thus alluded to by him:—"There is little doubt the streets without the wall at one time possessed these conveniences."² Another in the modernised form remains in Upper Northgate Street. Nearly all within the city are (or were) in the vicinity of the great gateways. There are two in Lower Bridge Street, East (to be presently noticed), but none in Watergate Street. Several exist on the west side of Northgate Street, at its northern end; the formation of the Potato Market there caused the removal of some.³ In Eastgate Street, the arcade of the Grosvenor Hotel replaced a similar one of the old "Royal" edifice. Close to the Eastgate, and encroaching upon the street, there is one on the south side, whose colonnades answer to the south portal of the gate.⁴ If a careful examination be made, either of the exterior of any of the 17th century houses yet remaining in the Rows of Chester, or depicted in the etched views of Batenham, as well as of the timber framework upholding them,⁵ they will be found to be exact counterparts of the old houses of the same period, with projected fronts supported by timber uprights, and forming the covered footways yet preserved in Foregate Street, or depicted in the illustrations of Cuitt. The

¹ One plate is dated 1814; the other 1809; the latter being of houses "lately taken down."

² *Op. cit.*, 286.

³ Well represented in an engraving, dated 1850, of Romney's "Chester and its Environs illustrated."

⁴ In an engraving of the old Eastgate, removed in 1766, other examples are shown.—*Vide Journals III.*, 345.

⁵ Well delineated in the fourth plate, dated 1810, of the Cheshire portion of Lysons' "Britannia Depicta," and in Dr. Howson's work, p. 33.

similarity is strengthened by the circumstance that the two lines of shops to be found in some of the Rows, with the footway between them, have representative examples at the street level in Foregate and Northgate Streets.

There is no essential difference in the character of the houses, whether at the Row or at the street level respectively—and the two will be found in juxtaposition on the west side of Northgate Street. The explanation of the mode of construction in one case is equally applicable to the other, and, simple though it be, is amply sufficient to account for the great peculiarity of the Chester Rows. Whether the houses first erected along the lines of elevation were framed on this colonnaded plan is a very open question, and is so far of importance, that if not similar in character to their modern representatives, what becomes of the suggestion that the footways were constructed through their solars? Probably, in the first instances, the houses, with or without jetties, were erected along the line of the footways, on a plan somewhat similar to that observed by Dr. Granville, at Königsberg, in 1827:—

“The system of large and elevated terraces above the streets, and in front of each house, prevails here as elsewhere, and where a number of shops or warehouses are situated, the merchants or tradesmen, with a view of attracting the notice of the passenger to their articles (necessarily placed, by the elevated situation of the shops, completely out of sight), expose in front of the terrace a wide painted board, on which are represented the different commodities to be found in their houses.”¹

Possibly it was not until the 14th century that the fronts began to be advanced and to cover over the terraced footways, and the practice once commenced, would soon be followed by the citizens in the principal

¹ “Journey to and from St. Petersburg,” 2nd ed., I., 347 - 8.

business streets, where land was valuable, frontage important, and the character of the houses gave ample protection to goods exposed for sale. The raising of the Row level, as well as the width of the various Rows, has been greatly influenced by the formation of the lower shops, &c., in the endeavour to give them plenty of internal height, and in making their fronts more important by high bulk-heads. The latter are almost invariably above the footway in the Row, towards which they slope, and frequently with a step down at the junction. A marked example of this in progress may be seen in Northgate Street, West, where may be noticed, standing by itself, "The Old Lightcake Shop." On either side of the front elevation, which is 6ft. in height, are respectively two and three steps of access to the Row, and one of these rises 2ft. and the other 2ft. 3in. above the pavement. The footway in the Row, over the body of the shop, is much higher than that on either side, and forms a prominent raised curve. Now, in the event of any structural change being effected in the next house but one to this, whereby the footway was elevated in a similar manner, it may be safely predicted that, when the intermediate house had to be reconstructed, the whole of the public way would form a level much above the original one. An example of this occurred in 1862, when "God's Providence House," in Watergate Street, was rebuilt; the level of the row pertaining to it being raised to that of the houses contiguous. (No one has had more or longer practical experience of the architecture of the Rows and the various causes that have led to changes in their levels, &c., than my friend Mr. T. M. Lockwood, Architect, of Chester, and he informs me that this levelling up process is commonly attendant upon any structural alterations in the Row buildings).

I am anxious to draw attention to three illustrations that assist our enquiry in throwing much light upon the peculiarities of the street architecture of Chester, especially as to the construction of the Rows. The first is Batenham's etching No. 24, dated 1816. Excepting in the upper and less elevated portion of the Row in Northgate Street, West, the only place now remaining in the city, where the row space is limited to the footway—that is, where no bulkhead intervenes between it and the street—is in Watergate Street, South, in the instance of two houses opposite Puppet Show Entry (the third and fourth, west of Bishop Lloyd's house). Here the steps of access to the footway are parallel to the street, instead of being at right angles, and this may have aided in preserving the present arrangement. In Batenham's etching the house adjoining on the east side is shown to be of the timber-fronted kind, the advanced portion of which is upheld by two wooden supports springing from the level of the roadway, behind which runs the footpath. At one side is shown a solid support in brick or stone. The mediæval entrance to the vault is a marked feature. When the house was rebuilt some years ago, the whole front of the row was advanced to the same line as the one to the east of it. It serves to show one mode of encroachment upon the street. (2) The second to notice is comprised in two of Batenham's etchings (No. 11 & 12), showing the east side of Lower Bridge Street from St. Olave's Church to Duke Street, and includes the whole of what was formerly known as Old Coach or Rotten Row. Below the church is represented a large brewery, beyond which are three small houses having their first storeys jettied or advanced; the remaining four houses have their projections more extended, and have extra supports. The footway commences to rise opposite the

south end of the brewery, and opposite the fourth house is level ; it then descends rather rapidly, and is continued on to Duke Street, behind the pillars of support, at a slight elevation above the street level. It is of much interest in serving to illustrate the gradual formation of a row, even to the construction of a vault with a vertical opening to the street. All that now remains of what has just been described, consists of the third and fourth houses from Duke Street, with their fronts supported over the footway. In front of one ("The Brushmaker's Arms") the latter is only 4 feet 10½ inches wide. On the opposite side of the street, from the "Falcon" to the "Bear and Billet," there are no traces either of a Row or of colonnaded houses, although the ground in the rear is, as in other sides of the city, much higher than the main street.

The third illustration will be found in Pennant's *Tour in Scotland* (1774), i., 1, the date of which we may fairly assign to 1769, the year when he commenced his tour,¹ and is worthy of being closely examined. It shows that the roadway had no side-paths, and the steps of access to the Rows projected far into it. Some of the row balustrades project considerably, and are supported by wooden uprights. One of the most noticeable features is the long wooden shoots protruding from the tops of the houses for the delivery of rain water; the modern system of down-spouts being unknown. They will explain the

¹ A sketch copy of it will be found in *Journal I.*, 109, and is lettered "Bridge Street, Chester, in the 17th century: from an old Print." This date is incorrect, as well as the one 1714 recorded in the List of Illustrations, xiii. The late Rev. W. H. Massie informed me it was taken from Pennant's plate, and a number of figures were added to it, including a military procession, where the soldiers are habited in the costume of the first half of the eighteenth century.

origin of the narrow pent-roofs over the tops of some of the Rows, as well as of the street stalls.¹

The following briefly summarises the views expressed in the foregoing remarks :—

1. That the four principal streets of Chester represent, as a whole, the original level of the site of the city during the Roman period.

2. That the elevation of the ground at the Row level is mainly due to the slow accumulation of refuse materials.

3. That the footways were probably constructed, or the space allotted for that purpose, at the same time as the roadways, and were at first unenclosed.

4. That the houses which lined them were not constructed after the Roman model, but on the ordinary English plan.

5. That it was not until the footways were sufficiently elevated that the crypts were erected below them, and not earlier than the latter part of the 13th century.

6. That the footways were gradually enclosed by the projection of the first storeys of the houses over them; the advanced portion being supported by timber posts.

7. That the later formation of the bulk-heads widened the area of the Rows and led to the further projection of the upper part of the houses.

8. That the peculiarity of the Row consists in the footway being raised on an artificial terrace above the roadway, and being enclosed (except towards the street),

¹ An excellent example is depicted in an engraving of an Elizabethan House at Exeter, in "Gentleman's Magazine," xxix., N.S. (1848), 500. The pent-houses or lean-to's were different from being enclosed. Their erection, with or without permission, led to many encroachments and other evils, both in Chester and elsewhere. A good instance of the troubles incident to the removal of some affixed to St. Dunstan's Church, Fleet Street, London, is recorded in "*Annual Register*," 1760, p. 172, and the "*London Chronicle*" of March 30—April 2, 1765.

and covered over by a colonnaded house; the latter being a mode of construction common to Chester.

9. That the crypts and places below the level of the Rows represent the cellars of houses elsewhere.

10. That there was no material difference in the character of the houses entering into the formation of the Rows (except as to the crypts), from those erected on the street level, of which examples yet remain in Fore-gate Street.

In bringing my paper to a conclusion, I do not for a moment wish it to be understood that I have attempted to write a complete treatise on the subject; I am perfectly well aware that there are many points relating directly and indirectly to it that I have barely touched upon. Such as it is, it must be considered simply as a contribution of notes towards the history of the great peculiarity of Chester. As my suggested explanation of the history of the development of the row system does not accord with the views entertained by other archæologists, this must plead as my excuse for my remarks having extended to an undue length.

