

THE OLD FARM HOUSE IN TOTTENHAM COURT ROAD.

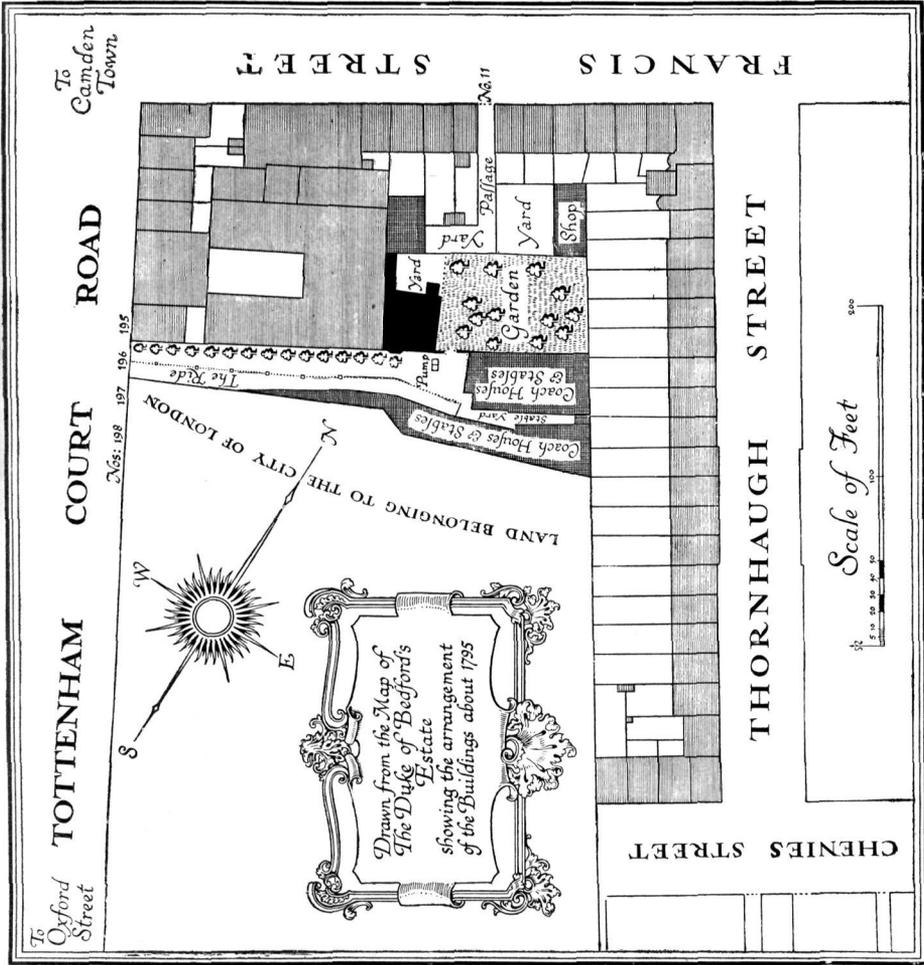
BY

AMBROSE HEAL.

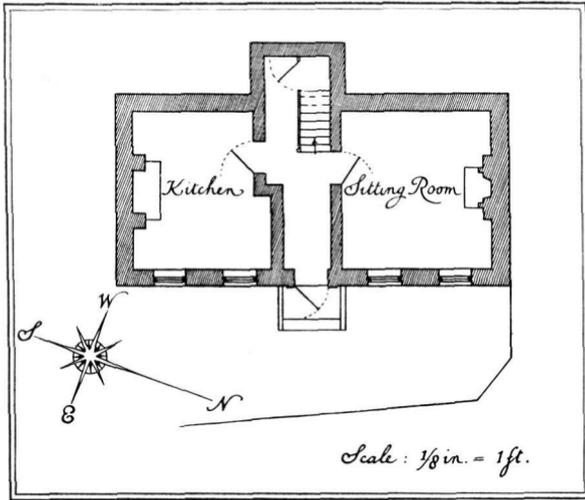
*Read before the London and Middlesex Archæological Society on the occasion of their
visit on March 15th, 1913.*

FEW, probably, have ever suspected the existence of a Georgian farm house within a mile of Charing Cross. Yet there it stands, a stone's throw from the busy thoroughfare we call Tottenham Court Road. So uncommon a survival deserves a word of memorial. The farm was called Capper's Farm, after the family which long held it as tenants of the Dukes of Bedford; and the land on which the house stands was known as Cantelowe Close.

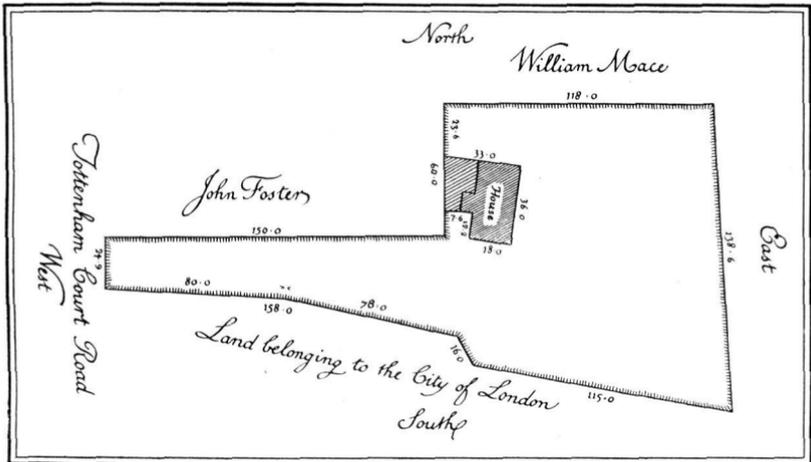
There is an early reference to it in the "London Gazette" for October 5th, 1693, where the following advertisement appeared: "Whereas on Monday the 25th past, in the night in the fields behind Southampton-house, four milch cows, the cattle of Christopher Capper, of St. Giles' in the Fields, were killed by stabbing in their bodies; and on Tuesday the 3rd instant, in the same fields in the night, two other milch cows, of the said Mr. Capper, were killed in like manner. Whoever shall discover the Person or Persons concerned in this fact so as he or they shall be convicted of such offence shall upon such conviction receive as a reward for such dis-



PLAN SHOWING THE OLD HOUSE AND GARDEN, WITH OUTHOUSES KNOWN AS "MILLER'S STABLES."



GROUND PLAN OF THE ORIGINAL PART OF THE HOUSE AS IT STOOD IN 1913.



PLAN ON LEASE GRANTED TO WILLIAM MACE, CARPENTER,
MARCH 22, 1776.

covery by the said Christopher Capper the sum of £20."

Farming in the good old days was as hazardous as other nominally peaceful activities. But in the obituary of his widow, which appeared in the "London Daily Post" for July 10th, 1739, Mr. Capper is described as "a great cow-keeper," so he evidently prospered in spite of his losses. The notice runs as follows:—

"On Friday last died, aged upwards of 70, Mrs. Capper, relict of Mr. Capper, formerly a great cow-keeper in Tottenham Court Road, St. Giles, and mother to Rev. Mr. Capper, lecturer of St. George's, Bloomsbury." The fact that Mr. Capper's son became lecturer at St. George's (the church with a king on its steeple) shows that the father could afford him a good education.

The farm lands were of considerable extent. They stretched northwards as far as Tottenham Court, which stood at what is now the junction of Tottenham Court Road and Euston Road, [See "plan of New Road"] and were bounded on the east by the fields at the back of Bedford House, formerly called Southampton House, which occupied the north side of what is now Bloomsbury Square until it was pulled down about 1800. [See "plan of New Road."] Mr. H. B. Wheatley, the eminent authority on London, says: "Behind Montague House (now the British Museum) was Capper's Farm, which extended to Tottenham Court Road. The old farmhouse still exists behind Messrs. Heal & Sons' shop, No. 195 Tottenham Court Road."—

[“London” (“Medieval Towns” Series) page 401.]
Some of the many duels which were to be witnessed from the back windows of Montague House were perhaps fought on Capper’s Farm, though the “Field of the Forty Footsteps,” of sinister repute, was not part of that estate.

About the middle of the eighteenth century, the farm was in the possession of two ladies whose habits won them some local notoriety. J. T. Smith, in his amusing “Book for a Rainy Day,” thus describes them: “The ground behind the north-west end of Russell Street was occupied by a farm belonging to two old maiden sisters of the name of Capper. They wore riding habits and men’s hats; one used to ride with a large pair of shears after boys who were flying their kites, purposely to cut their strings, the other sister’s business was to seize the clothes of the lads who trespassed on their premises to bathe.” Not very amiable old ladies, it is to be feared. They were excessively jealous of their privacy. When “the new road from Paddington to Islington”—the long road which is known in its various stages as Marylebone Road, Euston Road and Pentonville Road—was projected, one of them wrote a letter of protest to her landlord, the Duke of Bedford:—

“MY LORD,

“I am informed of a road intended to be made at the back of your grace’s estate which, from the dust and number of people, must entirely spoil those fields, and make them no better than one common land. I most humbly entreat your grace to prevent

such an evil, for it will be impossible for me to hold your grace's estate without a large abatement of rent. I am with all submission your grace's most dutiful and obedient servant,
 ESTHER CAPPER.
 14th February, 1756.

Whether Miss Capper got the stipulated abatement of her rent, which was at £3 an acre, or carried out her threat of quitting the premises, the road was made. In any case, she and her sister seem to have been the last Cappers of Capper's Farm.

We next come to one William Mace, a carpenter, who appears to have built the house which has stood until the present year. For on March 22nd, 1776, a lease for 78 years was granted to him at £7 a year by Gertrude, Dowager Duchess of Bedford—a great figure in eighteenth century society, as readers of Horace Walpole will remember—her son-in-law George, Duke of Marlborough; Caroline, Duchess of Marlborough, his wife; and Robert Palmer, agent to the late Duke of Bedford, as trustees under the duke's will, "in consideration of the great expense he hath been at erecting a Farm House on part of a field known as 'Cantelowe Close,' and that he, the said William Mace, shall build proper and convenient sheds and other outhouses for the accommodation of 40 cows at the least." [See plan.]

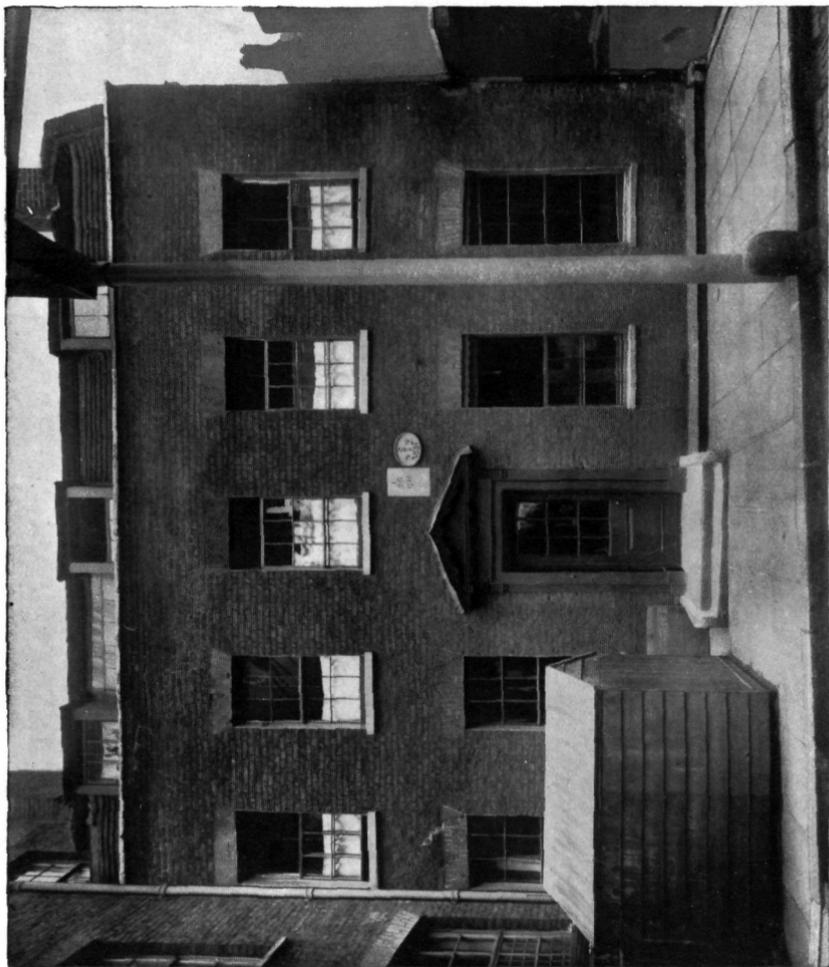
The house stood on the old boundary between the parishes of St. Giles'-in-the-Fields and St. Pancras, as is testified by the boundary marks—St. Giles, 1784, and St. Pancras, 1791—let into the wall above the doorway. Until the year 1900, the

ancient custom of beating the bounds was kept up by the parish officers and the schoolboys of the neighbourhood. The premises are now, however, entirely in the parish of S. Giles.

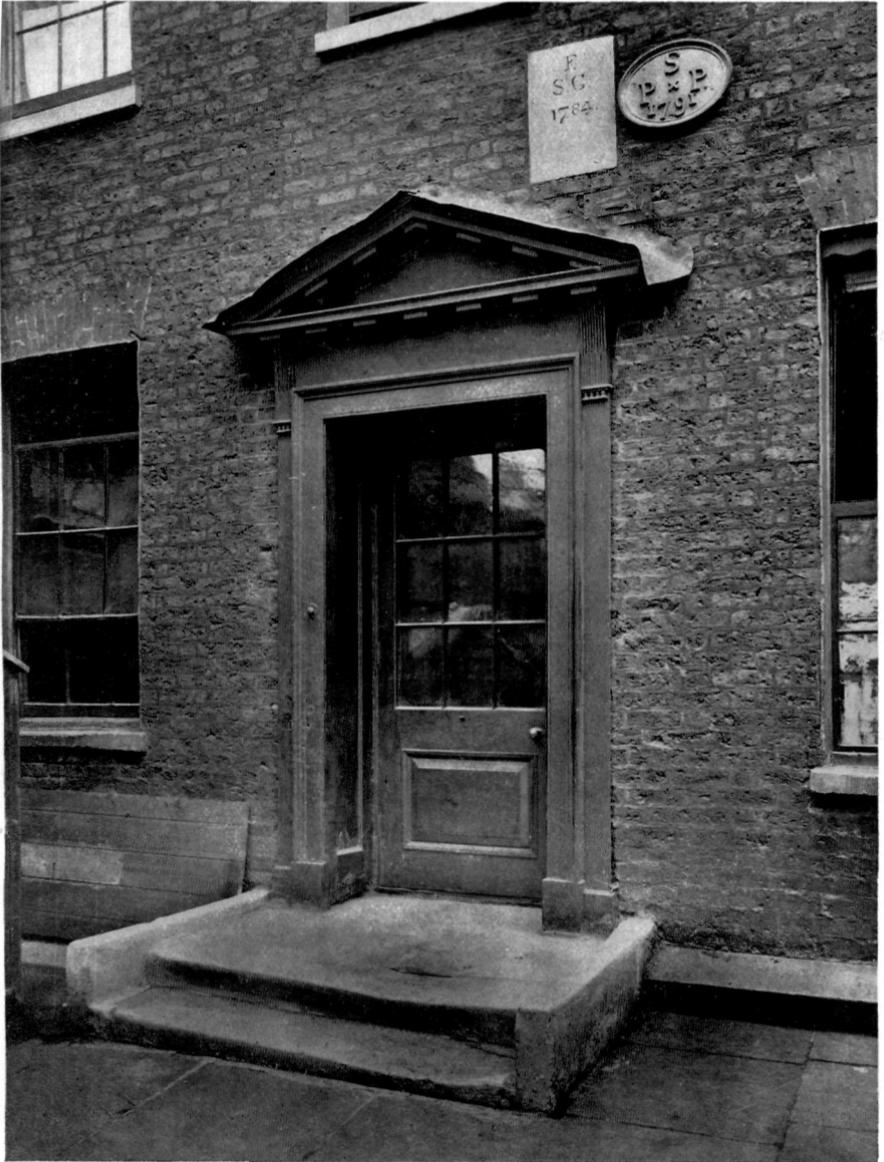
On what land William Mace was to graze the 40 cows does not appear from the lease ; but, according to Mr. Stutfield, the agent of the present duke, he was already a tenant of the Duke of Bedford and may have used his other holding for this purpose. Some evidence that he kept his contract is given by the large quantities of bovine bones which were discovered during the rebuilding of the packing rooms and factories after the fire in 1871.

But times were already changing. By the end of the eighteenth century Bloomsbury, though not yet the world of bricks and mortar we know, was fast losing its pastoral aspect. The farmer was giving way to the tradesman. The buildings on Cantelowe Close were no longer used for cattle, but as a livery stable for the horses of the gentry and well-to-do shopkeepers, who rode into town daily from their homes in the still rural districts of Hampstead and Highgate and Finchley. A long ride, bordered with trees, led from Tottenham Court Road to " Miller's Stables," as it was now called. The sites of these trees, and of the posts to which horses were tethered, and of the pump which furnished them with water, appear on the plan. [See Duke of Bedford's Estate map, 1795, here reproduced ; and also map attached to Dobie's History of St. Giles, 1829.]

Meanwhile the furniture trade, for which Tottenham Court Road has won world-wide renown, was



PHOTOGRAPH OF THE HOUSE, TAKEN JUNE, 1913.



THE FRONT DOORWAY WITH PARISH BOUNDARY MARKS.

coming into existence. In 1810 John Harris Heal, who had previously been in business with a firm at Savile House, Leicester Square, on the site of what is now the Empire Music Hall, set up business as feather dresser at 33 Rathbone Place, on the North side of Oxford Street. In 1818 he moved to 203 Tottenham Court Road, and in 1820 and 1842, respectively, Messrs. Shoolbred and Maple founded their well-known businesses in the same thoroughfare. After his death in 1833 his widow carried on the business, taking her son John Harris Heal into partnership in the following year, and trading as Fanny Heal and Son. [See "Tallis's Street Views," 1837.] Fanny Heal died February 26th, 1859, and was buried in St. Pancras Cemetery at Finchley.

In 1840 John Harris Heal the younger, who was the only son of the founder of the firm, purchased "Miller's Stables" and erected the buildings which—as No. 196 Tottenham Court Road—were the nucleus of the premises now occupied by Messrs. Heal and Son Ltd. For eight years he lived in the house built by Mace which, in spite of the extinction of the old open spaces, must have been a pleasant home, with its flower garden and fruit trees. In 1871 the old cowhouses and outbuildings were burned down, and packing rooms and a factory were put up in their stead. It is now proposed to rebuild the old shops, in order to bring the old and new into line, and construct at the rear a new model bedding factory which will involve the demolition—regrettable but inevitable—of the old Farm House.