

## PARGETTING IN SUFFOLK.

By F. A. GIRLING.

" . . . Some men wyll have theyr wallys plastered, some pergetted, and whytlymed, some rough cast, some pricked, some wrought with playster of Paris . . . ."

"Vulgaria," by WILLIAM HORMAN (1519).

## PROVENANCE.

Specimens of pargetting are widely scattered over England, including examples at Maidstone, Newark and Banbury. Elaborately decorated ceilings are to be found in Devon and good external work is to be seen at Ashwell in Hertfordshire. Probably Suffolk and Essex have more examples than any other similar area.

The luxury of this form of decoration is some indication of past affluence. In Suffolk, existing examples are most plentiful in the south-west corner of the county, the district which formerly derived the greatest prosperity from the wool trade.

## ETYMOLOGY.

The word "pargetting" is derived from the Old French "parjeter," to throw all over, to "roughcast." Pargetry and parge are other forms of the word. Perhaps its earliest use occurs in Wyclif's Bible of 1388, where in the 13th Chapter of Ezekiel there are the words "Where is the pargetyng which ye pargetiden?" A laying over, a pargetting . . . a roughcasting were regarded as synonymous terms by William Thomas, the compiler of a dictionary, who died in 1554.

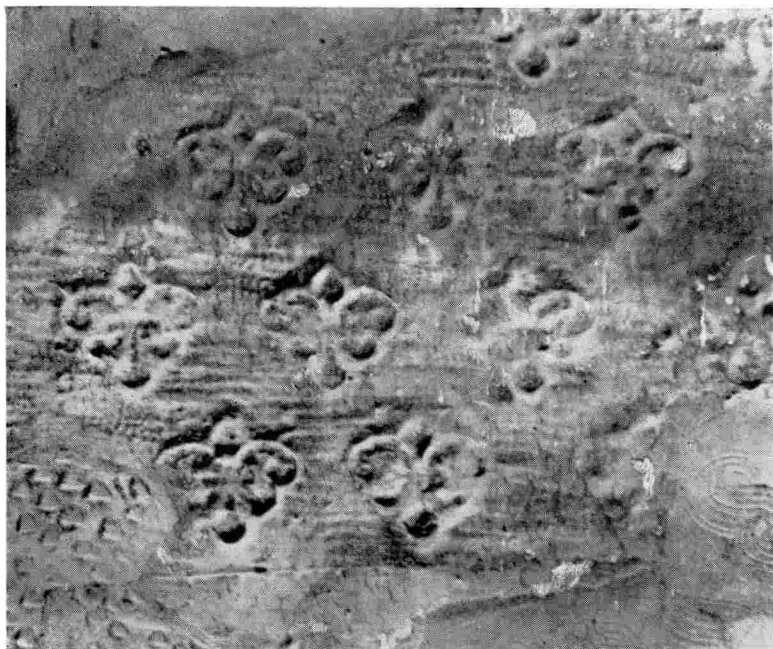
Originally this word referred to the decoration in relief of the plastering between the studwork on the outside of half-timbered houses, but from the 15th to the 17th centuries it was also applied to any ornamental covering. Thus it was used by the Elizabethan poets, Ben Jonson and Micheal Drayton in facetious allusions to the make-up of the women of their time.

A form of the word quoted in Parker's "Glossary of Architecture" is in the following abstract from a building account:—

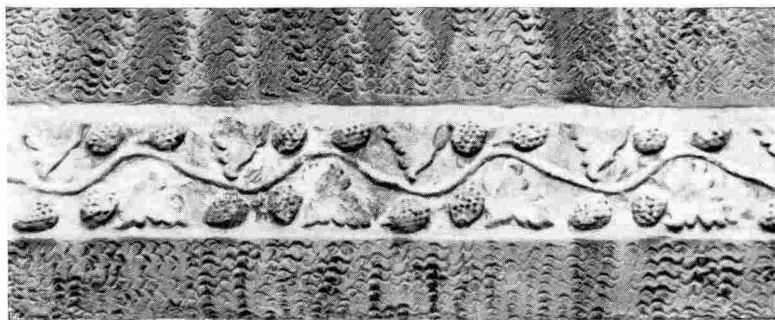
"1450 Johanni Bevis pro pargettyng et blanchyng vs."

## ORIGIN AND FUNCTION.

Owing to the lack of building stone in Suffolk, early builders had to rely on their native oak and clay as building material. Clay is only durable as long as it is kept dry, so plaster was used to protect it from the weather. Most of the decorative plasterwork now existing dates from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although plaster must have been used from time immemorial, little now remains which dates from before the time of Queen Elizabeth.



LONG MELFORD, SUFFOLK.  
Impressed fleur-de-lys ornamentation.



OTLEY HALL, SUFFOLK.  
Running plaster design of conventionalised grape  
vine on an external wall.



SIBTON, SUFFOLK.



LAVENHAM, SUFFOLK.  
Panel on a house in Church Street.

An early reference to this is to be found in the Steward's Accounts for 1418-1419 of Alice de Bryene of Acton in Suffolk, which were edited for the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology by Mr. V. B. Redstone, F.S.A. "item paid to John Chapman for 2 days in the month of April for daubing (terrestrand) the walls of the said carthouse 4d. and food in the household."

In Suffolk, decorative plasterwork is almost always found on timber framed buildings, although it was also used on buildings of clay lump. However, this type of construction is not as frequent in Suffolk as in Norfolk.<sup>15</sup>

#### MATERIALS.

Lime, sand and hair were the chief ingredients in the composition of the plaster. Road scrapings and cow dung are also mentioned as having been used. The late Henry Laver, F.S.A., suggested that sometimes a compound of oil and chalk was used to make the plaster tough.<sup>14</sup> For pargetting, one fourth part cow dung incorporated with the lime, is the proper proportion according to Batty Langley in "London Prices," 1750.

It is probable that the large quantity of hair used, was the chief factor which made it possible to work in high relief, and which has contributed to the durability of the plaster. This hair was, of course, scraped from the hides and not removed by chemical means as is the case to-day.

#### PRICKED AND SCRATCHED PATTERNS.

The earliest form of decoration probably consisted of dots made by indenting the plaster before it set hard. This was accomplished by driving nails through boards and impressing them upon the wet plaster. A coarse comb was used for producing zig-zag patterns, figures-of-eight, fan-scale and scallop designs. When this small-scale decoration was used, wall surfaces were divided up into rectangular panels, the panels being divided by shallow bands of smooth surface. Each panel would carry a different pattern, herring-bone, or guilloche or basket-work of interlacing squares.

#### EVOLUTION.

From these simple beginnings, decoration advanced so that in Queen Elizabeth's time, devices were modelled in relief representing figures, birds, leaves and branches. During Tudor times, Italian, French and Dutch plasterers were employed in some of the great houses, and English plasterers were undoubtedly influenced by them.

A charter was granted in the reign of Charles II which forbade a person to carry on the trade of plasterer without having been apprenticed seven years. During this reign much plasterwork was applied to the exteriors of many timber framed houses of much earlier date.

By the eighteenth century, external pargetwork had fallen into disuse and was already regarded as old fashioned. Bishop Pococke mentioned in his "Travels" (1756), "All the old houses in Herefordshire are built with frames of wood and cage work between called pargetting." Even so, degenerate work representing a revision to primitive forms, continued to survive.

#### AN IMPRESSED DESIGN AT LONG MELFORD.

On the north side of the road from Long Melford in the direction of Cavendish, is a house whose plaster work is covered by fleurs-de-lys, not in relief as is usual, but impressed. This effect seems to have been obtained by the use of a butter-pat kind of implement.

#### STRING-COURSES AND REPEATING PATTERNS.

String-courses do not always consist of a repeating pattern, but more often than not, they do. It is convenient to consider both together. Plasterers found repeating patterns very useful, because effective designs could be thus achieved easily and cheaply. A pattern with no undercutting was carved and a mould made from it. Any number of plaster casts could then be made. Usually repeats are about eighteen inches long, a convenient size for a workman to hold.<sup>11</sup>

The commonest motif is a grape-vine design displaying a wavy stem with bunches of grapes and vine leaves alternating. This pattern is to be seen externally at Otley Hall. At the Red Lion Inn, Debenham, it occurs on a cornice. In a house at Southwold, it decorates a beam. On a small scale, the vine pattern is to be seen forming a string-course on the House at Hadleigh which displays the arms of Bayning, cast in plaster.

At Walpole, at Walnut Tree Farm, there is a string course of running vine pattern along the front of the house, which also has a rectangular panel with the date 1708.

Along the front of a cottage at Yoxford runs a repeating pattern of conventionalised honeysuckle. At one end it terminates in a dragon's head. In the neighbouring village of Sibton, this identical pattern, including the terminal dragon, is used on another cottage. In both cases a human head is to be seen next the dragon. At Sibton, the cast of this head is used again together with conventional flowers, in one of the four areas of decoration above the string-course. Presumably both pieces of pargetting are the work of the same craftsman, using the same moulds.

A repeating pattern of very beautiful fleurs-de-lys, occurs on the northern gable of the old Black Lion Inn at Lavenham. It runs beneath the more noticeable geometrical pattern.

Simple wavy patterns from a repeating design, form string-courses on houses at Weybred, Ixworth and West Row, Mildenhall. Very much like them, is the pargetting in the gable of a dormer window on the west side of Clopton Hall, Wickhambrook.



STUTTON, SUFFOLK.

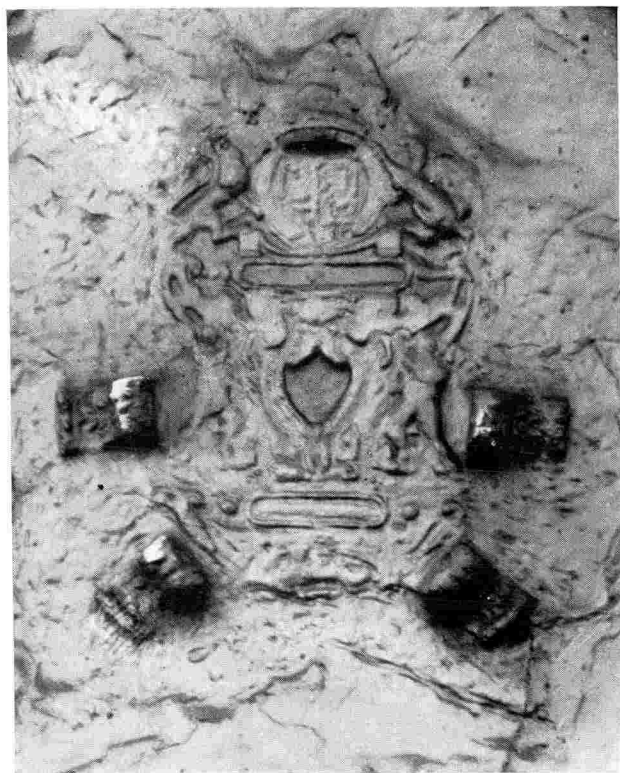


CLARE, SUFFOLK.

Pargetting on the Church House, Clare, Suffolk. The winged lion modelled in relief, has now disappeared owing to the plaster falling away.



HADLEIGH, SUFFOLK.  
Incised foliage decoration.



HADLEIGH, SUFFOLK.  
The Royal Arms, supported by amorini, probably early  
seventeenth century.

## PLASTER FRIEZES.

At Middleton Hall, Mendham, there is a frieze of cupids and foliage. It also is a repeating pattern. It may be compared with a frieze of hooped dragons at Braham Hall, Little Bromley, Essex.<sup>2</sup>

## STRAPWORK AND GEOMETRICAL PATTERNS.

Notable examples of the somewhat sophisticated seventeenth century all-over strapwork patterns occur in the neighbouring county of Essex at Colne Ford House and the Moot Hall, Wivenhoe.<sup>8</sup> It is surprising that Suffolk should be deficient in this particular type of pargetting.

One of the best geometrical patterns is on a wall surface of the old Black Lion Inn at Lavenham, which has squares and circles in relief. Beneath them runs a string-course of fleurs-de-lys. On the southernmost gable there are a dozen squares of raised strap work, three across and four down. They are all joined by short strips of raised plaster, and each outside square is connected to a raised circle.

The old "Live-and-Let-Live" Inn at Coddensham has a little original raised decoration of this kind. A few years ago the decayed plasterwork was restored as nearly as possible to its former appearance.

Another geometrical design composed of interlacing squares occurs on an old house at Nayland. It is illustrated by Mr. Basil Oliver in his "Cottages of England."

## GEOMETRICAL PATTERNS, STRAPWORK AND FLORAL ORNAMENT.

The more formal strapwork and geometrical patterns became popular during the later years of Queen Elizabeth and during the time of James I.

In this connection the following quotation from "English Decorative Plasterwork of the Renaissance" by M. Jourdain, is of interest:—" . . . the designs of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries may be divided into geometrical schemes . . . and into free designs either of strapwork or of all-over floral ornament, on which the work is modelled *in situ*, with the fingers and small tools, while certain repeating details, such as leaves and flowers, are pressed with a die, or cast and inserted."

At Clare and Stutton are examples of conventionalised foliage, simplified to the extreme and modelled in high relief. At Ixworth and Hadleigh are incised vegetative designs which cover large surfaces divided into panels. They are of little artistic merit. Fragmentary remains of better work are to be seen at the Priory, Lavenham.

## CHURCH HOUSE, CLARE.

In addition to the well known simplified foliage pattern, special mention must be made of the representation of a winged monster which no longer exists. Formerly beneath one of the windows, enclosed in a small panel, was portrayed a fabulous beast, the fore part having the



head, wings and legs of a bird and the hind part resembling the body of a lion or leopard. Unfortunately the plaster has fallen away and the beast has disappeared. In the western gable is a shield bearing the three chevrons of the Earls of Clare and the date 1473.

Mr. Basil Oliver has suggested that the plaster work may well be as old as this, but if it is, it must be one of the oldest examples of pargetting in this country. Mr. Geoffrey Webb describes it as Jacobean work.

Another house in Clare, near the south end of the village, has large rectangular panels, roughcast, and surrounded by a repeating pattern. Within the panels are conventional floral designs. At some date subsequent to the plastering, the windows have been enlarged and some of their positions altered. Owing to this, some of the decoration is mutilated.

#### A PANEL OF FOLIAGE AT LAVENHAM.

An isolated rectangular panel on a house in Church Street, Lavenham, has an oval wreath of foliage, whose leaves and stems overflow into the spandrel between the oval and its frame. In the centre, the plaster has decayed but it is possible that originally it displayed a date or initials.

On a house at Hadleigh, called the Flying Chariot, there are fragmentary remains of foliage decoration. Sun Court, Hadleigh, also has fragmentary pargetting of a similar character.

#### THE ROYAL COAT OF ARMS IN PLASTER.

The magnificent representation of the coat of arms of Charles II on the Sparrowe House at Ipswich is well known. Less familiar is the large coat of arms, with supporters, of Queen Elizabeth in a house on the south side of the square at Beccles. It occupies the whole wall surface over a fireplace and is a magnificent example of work of the period. It may be compared with another example of the Tudor coat, which is to be seen on the external wall of an inn at Sandwich, Kent. In the neighbouring county of Norfolk, the arms of James I occur in a ceiling at Gt. Yarmouth and those of James II at Diss.

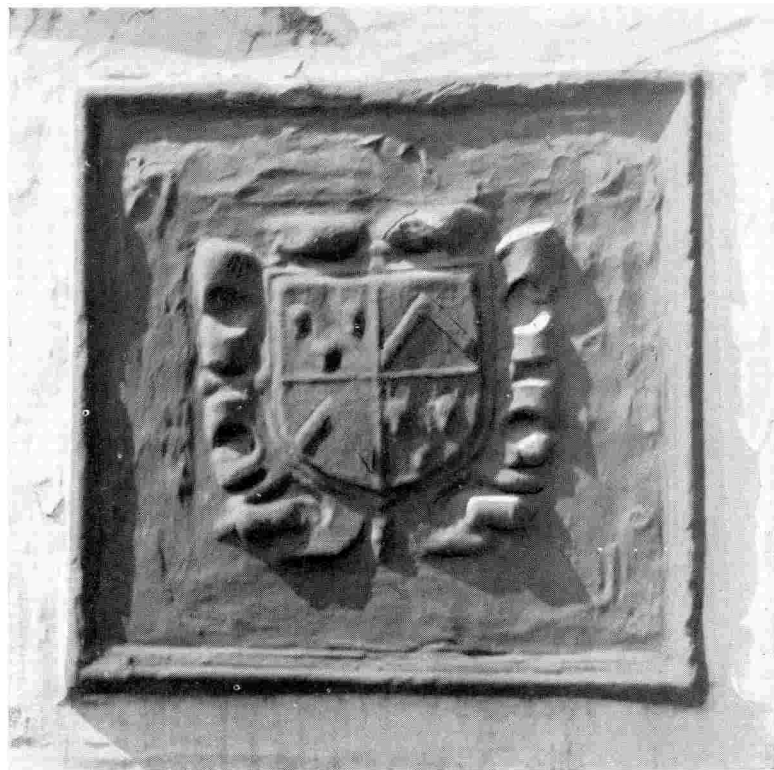
At Hadleigh, there is an example of the Royal Arms in each of the gables of a house on the south side of the main street. They have been limewashed so many times as to be scarcely recognisable. Flanked by a Tudor rose on each side, the design has the appearance of being held in place by four projecting pieces of plaster. They hold a flamboyant design which includes a pair of amorini, above which is the royal coat of perhaps Charles I. Above, in one of the gables, is the date 1618. This is not necessarily evidence of the date, as it might have been put there before or after the design. However, as the unicorn is one of the supporters, it must date from after the accession of James I in 1603.

On the Bayning house at Hadleigh, there are other small heraldic motifs connected with the crown. A Tudor rose, slipped, is surmounted by a crown and supported by the Royal supporters, a lion and unicorn. The group is repeated.



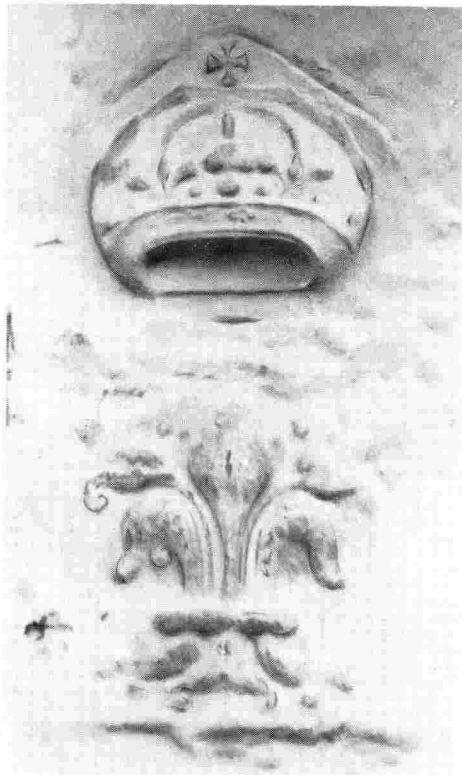
HADLEIGH, SUFFOLK.

Arms of Bayning on exterior wall.



SUDBURY, SUFFOLK.

The Arms of Cavendish rendered in pargetting. They are on one of the old houses in North St. which were recently threatened with demolition.



LAVENHAM, SUFFOLK.

Plaster casts on south wall of Swan Inn. They are representations of a Bishop's mitre above and a well-modelled Fleur-de-lys below.



IXWORTH, SUFFOLK.

Plaster cast (one of a series of four, all similar) in the plastered wall of a house at the Southern end of Ixworth village.

At Palgrave, on a house on the south side of the village green, there are casts of a lion and a unicorn in high relief, placed slantwise in the attitude of heraldic supporters. They are flanked by large fleurs-de-lys painted on the wall.

#### COATS OF ARMS OF CAVENDISH AND BAYNING.

On the outside plastered wall of an old house in North Street, Sudbury, is a square plaster tablet, displaying in relief the arms of Cavendish quartering Smith. The same coat, in plaster, also appears in the ceiling of an old house in Cavendish, now used as the Reading Room. Probably both were cast in the same mould.

An interesting parallel case is that of the arms of Bayning. On a house at Hadleigh, on the plastered wall facing the main street, there are two square plaster panels on each of which is a shield in high relief. Mr. Charles Partridge, F.S.A., informs me that the charge is : Or two bars sable each charged with as many escallops of the field. The shield is surmounted by a helmet and crest, an ostrich holding in its mouth a key.

There are three, formerly four, similar coats in the ceiling of an old house at Brantham. They appear to be exactly similar although now obscured by many layers of limewash.

From the occurrence of these shields in various townships it seems that in at least two wealthy families, it was customary during the seventeenth century, for the steward to keep a stock of the coat of arms, cast in plaster, ready to supply to the workmen when house building or doing repairs on the scattered properties.

#### SOME SMALL HERALDIC MOTIFS.

*The Fleur-de-lys.* The fleur-de-lys was a very popular decorative motif. They were pre-cast and inserted, apparently for no particular reason, here and there, both externally and indoors. It occurs at Lavenham on the Swan Inn and on other houses. One example at Kersey is seen on a gable. At Bildeston another isolated example is on a first floor wall of premises formerly occupied by Mr. W. W. Kitton. At Athelington it forms part of the decoration of a gable of a house near the church. It is to be found plentifully on ceilings in many parts of the county.

*The Tudor Rose.* This embellishment is to be seen in various parts of the county, notably at Hadleigh, Kersey and Sibton. Internally, especially on ceilings it seems to have been as popular as the fleur-de-lys.

*Other Conventional Flowers.* At Lavenham, Sibton, Athelington and other places, there are other conventionalised flowers of uncertain parentage.

*Bishop's Mitre.* In the walls of the Swan Inn and other places at Lavenham there are casts representing a Bishop's mitre. It is somewhat squat in form and might be mistaken for a crown. As this was a flourishing cloth making town, these casts probably have reference to St. Blaise, the patron Saint of wool combers.

## 17TH CENTURY OVAL DECORATIVE PANELS.

In Seckford Street, Woodbridge, is a large plain oval frame. Any decoration it may have enclosed formerly, has disappeared. At Nayland a similar large oval frame encloses a shield with initials and the date 1690.

At Finningham there are two very fine oval panels on a house near the church. One has a grape-vine design and the other displays a fig tree. The frame of the vine panel is plain and in bold relief. Each bunch of grapes is exactly similar to the other. So are the leaves. Obviously these details were pre-cast and inserted by the plasterers when executing the main design *in situ*.

The more elaborate frame of the other panel is of interest as it gives a clue to the date of these decorations. It is very similar to a third panel, dated 1692, which existed in the village until a few years ago, when the cottage, of which it formed part, was burnt. Here again the sections of the elaborate oval frame appear to have been cast from the same moulds as those of another oval plaque in the neighbouring village of Cotton, dated 1691. So it seems that ovals were in fashion in the last decade of the 17th century.

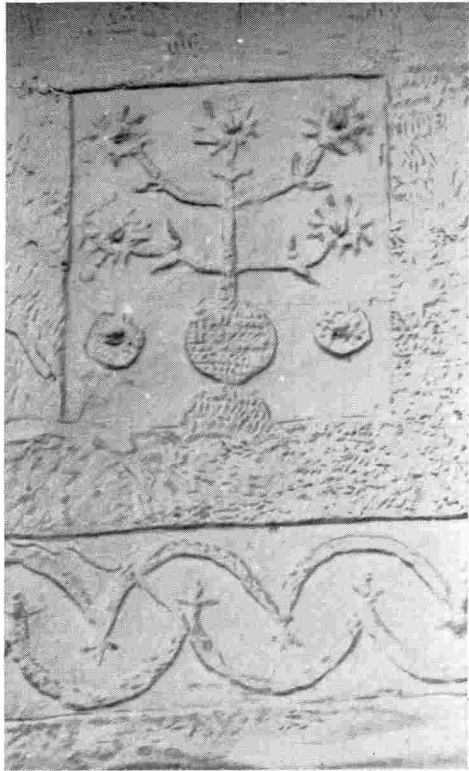
## SYMBOLISM.

At Badwell Ash, Woolpit, Weybred and West Row, Mildenhall, and also at Ixworth, there are symbolical embellishments which all appear to be versions of the same theme, a flowering or fruiting tree, growing out of a pot, circle or globe. Those at West Row are naturalistic in treatment, those at Badwell Ash, Woolpit and Weybred more conventionalised, whilst those at Ixworth are so simplified that unless it was possible to follow the transition, they would scarcely be recognisable as belonging to the same group of designs. The Rev. H. A. Harris has very kindly examined these designs for me and considers them to be fertility charms.

The two trees at West Row are modelled in relief and the scale is large. They were, no doubt, modelled *in situ* and not pre-cast. At Woolpit and Badwell Ash the design stands out in low relief from the smooth recessed surface. They are much alike, and are probably the work of the same craftsman. At Weybred there are three or four examples of the design above a shallow string-course which runs along the front of the house. The very simplified Ixworth examples are in high relief and on a smaller scale than the others. It is characteristic of this group of designs that there are in every case, two or more examples of the same pattern on each of the houses in question. In four cases out of five, it occurs above a string-course, which runs round the house at about the level of the first floor.

## SUN COURT, HADLEIGH.

At Sun Court, Hadleigh, there is an unusually sophisticated embellishment consisting of swags, pendants and scrolls and surmounted by a shell. It seems to have been let into the plaster of the wall, which is otherwise decorated by a simple, and presumably earlier, foliage pattern.



WOOLPIT, SUFFOLK.



WEST ROW, MILDENHALL, SUFFOLK.

## COLOURED PARGETTING.

To-day, most examples of pargetting are colourwashed white, cream or pink, in the same way as a plain plastered wall. The Royal coat of arms on the Sparrowe House at Ipswich is coloured, and it is probable that much of our plasterwork was originally so treated. Richard Knolles in his "Historie of the Turks" (1603) writes of "pargeting of divers colours."

A statute dating from the early years of the reign of James I provides further evidence, for it enacted that "no plaisterer shall exercise the art of a painter . . . . or lay any colour or painting whatsoever, unless he be a servant or apprenticed to a painter, or have served seven years apprenticeship to that trade."

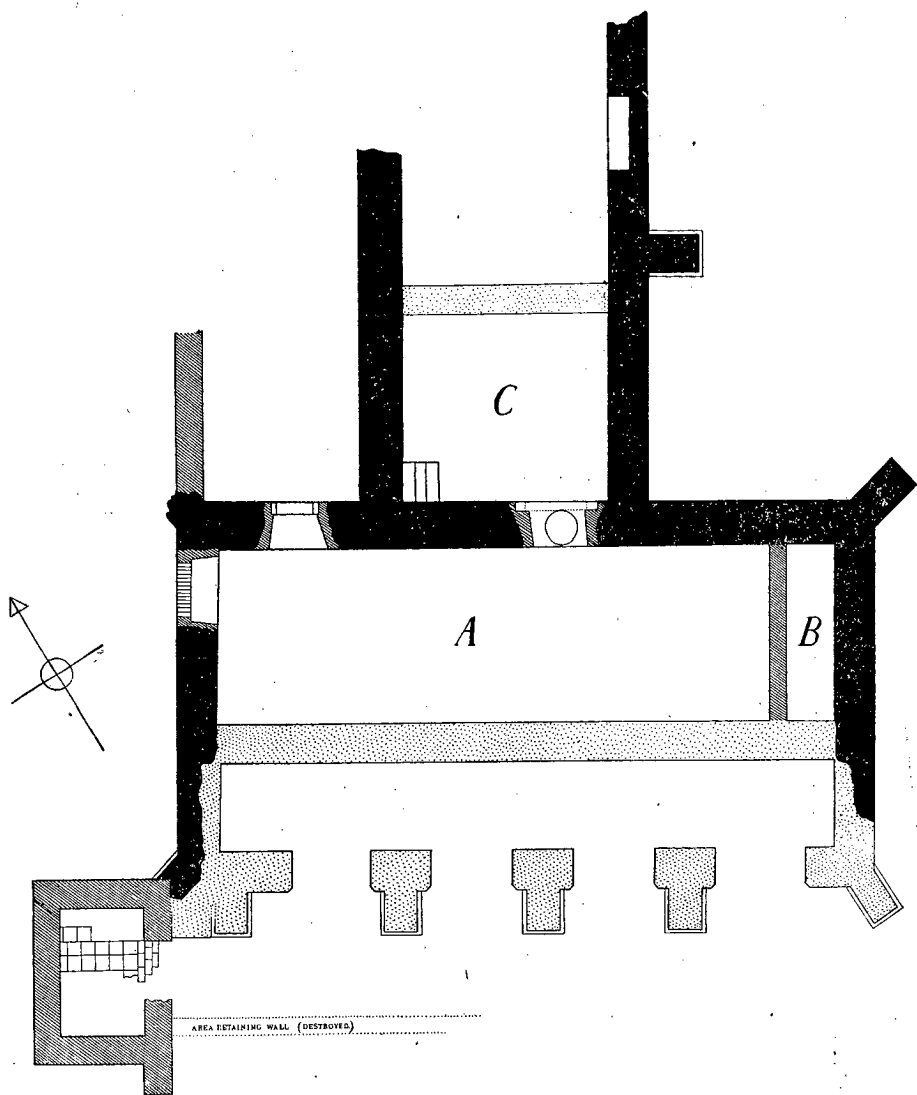
There are traces of colour on the decorations on Bishop Bonner's cottage at Wymondham, Norfolk, but it is impossible to say if the original colours are perpetuated.

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# Grey Friars Monastery

••Dunwich••



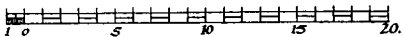
Scale  of Feet.

FIG. 1.