

Suffolk Institute of Archæology.

THE OLD TIMBERED HOUSES OF SUDBURY.

By W. W. HODSON.

IN not a few of the East Anglian old cloth towns, are still many remains of the 15th and 16th century timbered houses, where the opulent woollen merchants and clothiers once lived, and of the humbler dwellings and weaving shops whose walls echoed to the clatter of busy looms, the whirring on spinning wheels, and the rattling of the bobbins of the warping frames. These interesting architectural remanents of a prosperous epoch in our country's history, are, however, fast disappearing, and soon will be known only by the etchings in some pictorial itinerary, or the more rigid "elevations" and drawings in some archæological journal.

The old Saxon border-town of Sudbury, or *Suth-burgh*, was at one time famous for its ancient timbered houses, with their turretted chimney stacks, projecting bressumers, carved corner-posts, verge-boards, and door and gateway spandrels, high pitched tiled roofs, with quaint dormer windows, and pleasant "solar" chambers, with their wide diamond-paned casements, and bracketed oriels. Many of these pleasant and picturesque piles have been swept

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away by the relentless besom of Improvement Commissioners, and others have been modernized, but even now, above the new stuccoed fronts, and plate-glass windows, and "blind" facias and parapets, may be seen the original steep, mossy and lichened, tiled roofs, and the octagonal, or turretted chimnies, singly or in groups, with their curious ornate cornices, and solid "stepped" bases. Some of these chimney-stacks are but the ghosts of their former selves, curtailed and patched and daubed with mortar almost out of knowledge, yet they are easily distinguishable from their attenuated, and awkward-looking successors, with their ugly capping chimney pots, or creaking funeral-like vanes. In olden times the chimnies of a house were distinguished features, designed not only for use, but with an eye to architectural effect, and they consequently add to the attractiveness and dignity of a building, be it mansion, farm-house, or thatched cottage. Many of the Sudbury houses were much altered soon after the passing of the Local Improvement Act of 1825, which also effected prospective buildings, for there was a clause that all houses hereafter built "should be made to rise perpendicularly from the foundations thereof." Sir Robert Peel, in a debate upon the disfranchisement of the borough, in the House of Commons, having occasion to refer to this Act, designated it as "a most extraordinary piece of legislation to compel people to build their houses upright." Fulcher refers to this in his "Life of Gainsborough," and remarks, "The great statesman's thoughts running more upon the bribery and corruption of the place, than its over-hanging stories, he appeared almost to doubt whether the political deviations from the upright had not extended, even to the construction of the freemen's dwellings, and to imagine that they had been either built, or warped after the manner of the leaning tower of Pisa."

We now purpose sauntering through the streets of the town, and noticing some of the principal old timbered, and other houses, oft pointed out with pardonable pride by Sudburians to curious strangers, including some other

interesting relics hidden away in nooks and corners. Passing down North Street from Melford Road—the entrance once sentinelled by two lofty and busy windmills—next the new Liberal Club we see a plain gabled house, with a shield on the front containing the arms of Cavendish quartering Smith, *viz.*, 1 and 4, sable, 3 stags' heads cabossed argent—*Cavendish*; 2 and 3, argent, a chevron between 3 cross-crosslets gules—*Smith*. The noble family of Cavendish was connected with the village of Cavendish, near Sudbury, for 200 years from the time of Sir John Cavendish, Chief Justice of the King's Bench, who was beheaded in Wat Tyler's rebellion at Bury S. Edmund's, at the same time the insurgents beheaded Archbishop Theobald, a native of Sudbury, on Tower Hill. George Cavendish was gentleman usher to the famous Wolsey, and his brother, William, was the founder of the Dukedom of Devonshire. William, the grandson of George, sold the manor of Cavendish, Overall, and other estates, to William Downs, of Sudbury, in 1569. A similar shield to that at Sudbury is over the porch of Pentlow Hall, near Cavendish, and Horace Walpole had exactly the same arms in old painted glass in the entrance hall at Strawberry Hill, which he had probably picked up in this part of the country.

A little further up the street on the same side is a well preserved timbered front, with upright joists, and projecting upper story. In several of the houses in this street are seen the outlines of small rectangular, or square windows, now blocked up by the side of larger openings. Many of the upper stories overhang the narrow footway, and the low rooms, whose brick or pamment floors are beneath the street level, have plain or moulded ceiling joists, with plaster between the rafters. By the side of the narrow fireplaces are long narrow cupboards, shewing where the wide open hearths and cosy "ingle-nooks" formerly were. Nearly opposite the Dragon Inn are several old houses, similar to those described, and on the wall of one, taken down nearly thirty years ago, was found a fine large fresco, spiritedly painted in bright colours of a lion hunt, but as

it was on a party-wall, unfortunately it could not be preserved.

At the bottom of the street is the Old Market Place, where the "Corn Cross" formerly stood, and a number of butchers' shambles and stalls, mentioned in an Inquisition taken in the reign of Henry the Sixth. Here the corn and butter markets were held, and national and local holidays and fair days were kept. An old inhabitant remembers, when he was a boy, seeing the young men and maidens dancing round a May-pole placed here, gay with ribbons, which were plaited and unplaited in the mazes of the dance, and garlanded with hops, which were then grown in the immediate neighbourhood. On the south-east side of the "Place" stands the George Inn, which is mentioned in the Will of Nathaniel King, a liberal benefactor to the town in 1614, and though now it has a comparatively new front, many of the original internal features, including a wide staircase and landing, remain intact.

Passing by the east end of S. Peter's church, where a house formerly stood obstructing the roadway, we see the "Rose and Crown," a good specimen of an early hostel, with part of the external gallery (at the east side) which formerly surrounded the court yard, still visible, the remainder also existing, but enclosed. The outer side walls are partly timbered, and in parts "wattled," that is, are formed of upright faggot sticks embedded in clay instead of lath and plaster. Behind the outer door leading to the cellar are remains of original white-washed walls, small latticed window openings, &c. "The Crown at Sudbury" is alluded to at an early date in connection with the Waldegrave family. Two hundred years ago one of the front commercial rooms was known as the "Lyon Parlour." There is little doubt there has been an hostel here from time immemorial, the rendezvous of soldiers, priests, and pilgrims, crusading knights, portly burgesses, and wealthy cloth makers and wool merchants of the ancient trade guilds; as well as of their degenerate and more prosaic descendants of modern times.

† The "Oak Inn," King Street, is a good specimen of a 16th century inn, with low ceiling, narrow winding and acute-angled passages, plenty of wood in its composition, and ground floor lower than the pavement.

Half a century back S. Peter's church was hemmed in by old houses, westward from the north to the south great doors. There was also a row of houses at the end of Borehamgate Street, near which, according to tradition, the Mint stood in Saxon times. On both sides of the Market Hill, particularly on the north, are many old houses, though much altered, both outside and inside. The residence of Mr. W. I. Wright, bookseller, is a good specimen. The spacious and lofty cellar, originally, no doubt the living or reception room, has thick walls, largely built of thin mediæval tiles, intermixed with flint and very hard grouting and mortar. In the north wall is a winding staircase leading to an upper room. Massive beams with braces support the ceiling, and on one of the joists is a well-carved "*patera*" or four-leaved flower of the "Perpendicular" style, identical with those on the soffits of the arches in the nave arcade of All Saints' church. Upstairs there are double floors, and the space between might easily have been utilised in troublous times as an outlaw's hiding place, or "priest's hole." The original stairways are wide, and the timbers throughout of old oak. Inside, as also in the neighbouring houses on either side, both in the upper and lower rooms, are massive moulded girders with well-carved bosses.

The "Black Boy," a few doors lower down the hill, is an old inn, with quaint projecting "bay" windows, and wide gateway, flanked by slender piers with moulded circular caps and bases, probably of the 15th century.

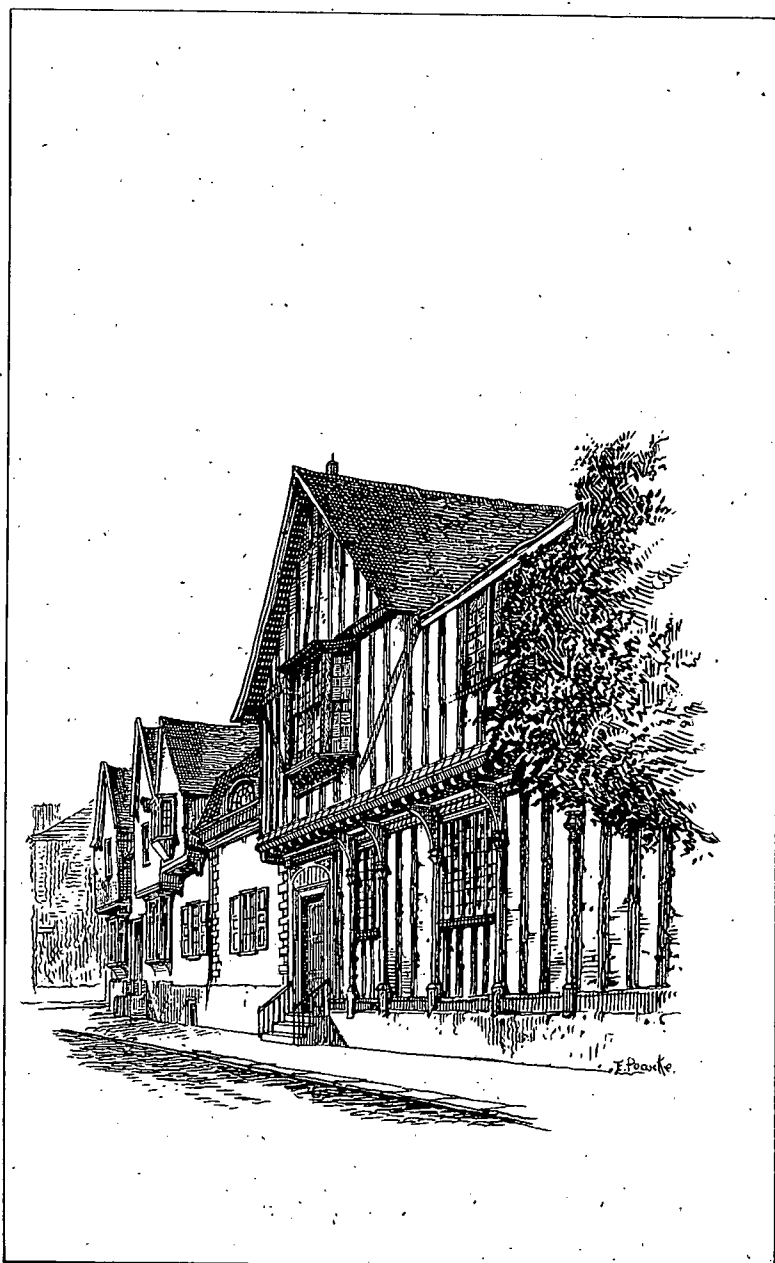
Till a year or so back at the lower end of the show room, recently occupied by Mr. E. Andrews, coach builder, was a finely carved ceiling in oak of a distinctly ecclesiastical type, arranged in squares with 16th century work in geometrical patterns, and conventional foliage. Probably it was the ceiling of the private oratory of some cloth

merchant, or of the chapel of one of the guild halls which were found in most cloth-making towns.

The ancient Moot Hall, a very picturesque and interesting building, mentioned in the borough records in connection with a trial for heresy in the time of Queen Mary, with the performance of plays and "enterludes" provided gratis for the inhabitants by the Corporation in the time of Queen Elizabeth, with a "bread riot" in a time long ago of agricultural depression, and with an imprisonment of Mayor, Aldermen, and Councillors, by the aggrieved free burgesses, stood at the bottom of the Market Hill, till it was taken down in 1843, the present Town Hall having been erected near S. Peter's church. There being documentary evidence to show that Sudbury possessed a Mayor and Constables as early as 1274, it is probable that a Moot Hall with dungeons underneath stood on this spot, perhaps from Saxon times, where the local Wittenagemot was held in the days when this was the capital borough of the southern division of the East Anglian kingdom, as Norwich was the metropolis of the northern province.

At the commencement of Sepulchre Street, adjoining Burkitts' Lane, stands a fine red-brick house, with an upper storey added a quarter of a century back, but altered and somewhat modernized internally. In the fanlight over the front door is worked the monogram, "E.B.," the initials of Edward Burkitt, one of the former owners and residents, locally known as a good musician and composer. The Burkitt family came here from Northamptonshire about 1643, and lived for two centuries or more in this house.

The Rev. Miles Burkitt was ejected from his living at Hitcham by the Act of Uniformity. His second son, William, was the writer of the once very popular Commentary on the New Testament. The Burkitts were the friends of the Cromwells, and in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for Octr., 1841, is an interesting account of a cabinet which belonged to Bridget, daughter of Oliver Cromwell, who left it to her niece Mrs. Sarah Neville, who was married in 1684, to Mr. Thos. Burkitt, since which



SALTERS HALL, SUDBURY.

time it has remained in the possession of the descendants of his family. John Bunyan was a great favourite with his patrons and protectors, the Burkitts, and he is said to have frequently visited them at Sudbury, and preached in the large low-roofed and old fashioned kitchen. There is a fine wide oaken staircase with turned balusters, and carved newels, and in one or two bedrooms are fire places with the Dutch tiles painted with quaintly conceived scenes from bible and classical history.

A short distance further down on the same side was the residence of the great Sudbury landscape and portrait painter, Thomas Gainsborough, and in the orchard behind the house still stand some venerable thorns and fruit trees, beneath which was an arbour, where, as a boy, he sketched in pencil and crayons. The title-deeds shew that the estate was called *Gibblins* in 1645, and that it came into the possession of the Gainsborough family in 1725, and was sold to John Gainsborough, one of the sons of the painter, in 1735, for £500. Next door was the "Black Horse" Inn. Scheming Jack Gainsborough, the painter's clever but eccentric brother, lived in the adjoining house. The old external features of the painter's birth-place are now hid by a front of toned and mellowed bricks of the later Georgian period.

Stour Street is the *beau ideal* of an old-world and picturesque street, the curious gabled and timbered houses, with the branching ornamental trees partly screening them and hanging over the roadway, giving an agreeable shade in the "dog-days," forming a very attractive picture, which has often pleased visitors. The street is also historically interesting in several respects. Here stood "Sudbury" Hall, and the "Salter's" Hall, and at the junction of Sepulchre and Gregory Streets with Stour and School Streets, was a large "croft," where before the Reformation stood the Norman or Early English church of S. Sepulchre. There are some old houses on the east side of the entrance to School Street, leading to the Grammar School (founded by Wm. Wood, warden of S. Gregory's College, in 1491),

which, till a few months back when the street was widened, had good pargetted fronts, with floral designs, grapes, &c. The new plaster has obliterated nearly the last remains of pargetting in the town.

The large corner house on the west side of the entrance to School Street has a front of black and white chequer work, with finely proportioned gables and good raftered ceilings. The rooms on the garden side are large, one was for many years used as a private school. When the cellars were enlarged in 1768, so many human bones were found that the workmen said it reminded them of a charnel house. The excavators had plied their avocation among the graves of S. Sepulchre. The house in question was formerly in the possession of the ancient family of the Carters, the ancestors of Capt. Samuel Carter, R.N., of Stanway, Essex, by whose intrepid exertions, as commander of the Lowestoft life boat, so many lives were saved half a century or more ago, on the Suffolk coast.

Pursuing our way towards Mill Hill, on the same (south) side of the street, we arrive at a splendid example of an ancient timbered house, with wide hall, projecting trusses and bressumers, oriel and dormer windows, and by quaint-carved allegorical or heraldic figures of men and animals on the bowing lintel of the centre window above the entrance. This fine structure was formerly known as "Salter's Hall," and an engraving is given of it in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for August, 1841, where it is stated that the house was probably built in the reign of Henry VI. (1422) or Edward IV. (1461), as it nearly resembles the style of a very handsome house at Lynn of that period. The original enriched barge or verge-board, and ponderous oaken doors are gone. The constructive portions of the upright and curved bracing timbers are well displayed. The house formerly stood on a level with the street, but Mill Hill was much steeper 40 years ago than it is now. In the rear of the house are large outbuildings, ceiled with chestnut joists, over which spiders never weave their webs. The house is now the residence of Surgeon-General Sparrow.



OLD "MAYOR'S HOUSE," SUDBURY.

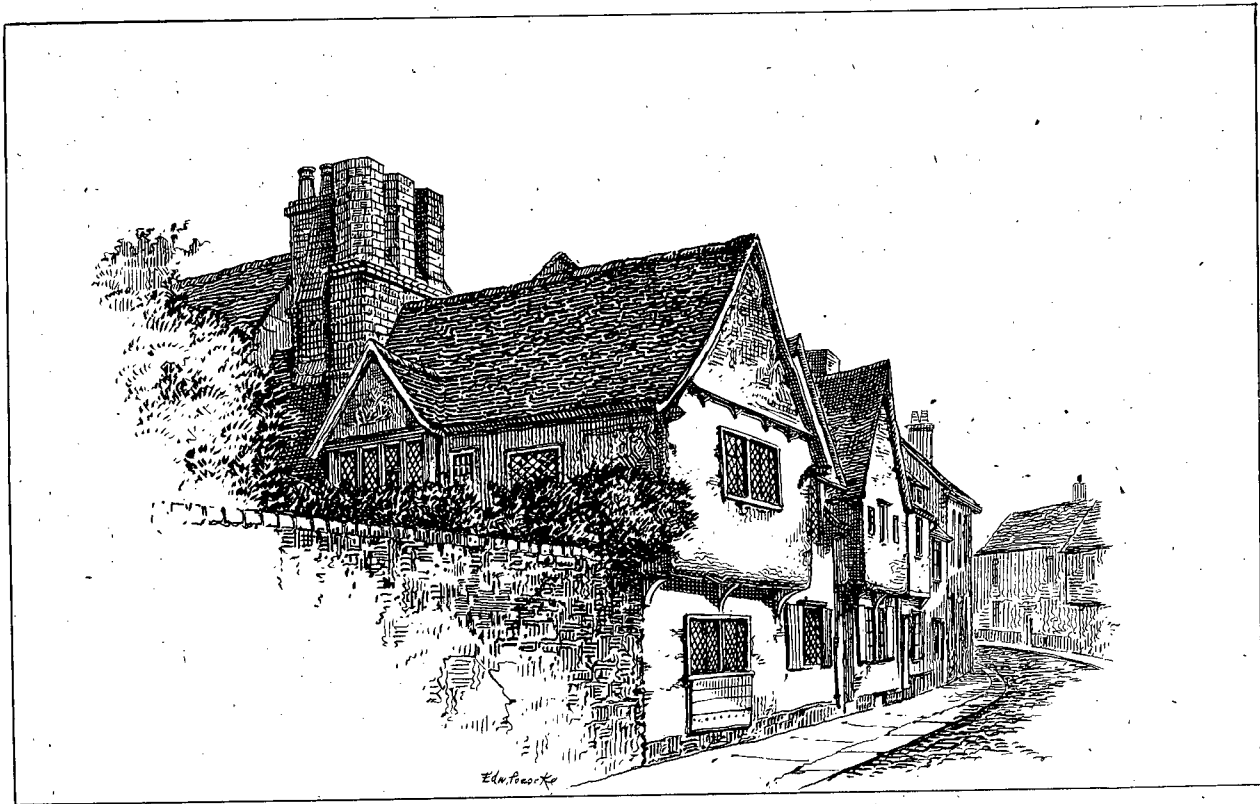
Cross Street has many remains of the past, most of the houses being gabled, with projecting upper stories, large chimnies, and wide passages leading to the yards, courts, and gardens behind, which overlook the pleasant meadows and the winding river and boundary ditches. It was 200 years ago an aristocratic suburb, but the conditions are now much altered.

What is known as "The Mayor's House," on the east side of the street, is a particularly interesting type, partly restored. It contains all the characteristic pictorial features of the old houses of the period, together with a marked idiosyncrasy of its own. There are the well-known tiled roofs, the overhanging gables, the projecting windows with their leaded diamond-paned casements, the small side-openings or auxiliary "lights," the bold brackets and trusses, and the heavy oak planked door, with strong ornamental hinges. There was formerly a long panelled room taking up nearly the whole of the first story, which might have been used as a Justices' room, or a refectory for corporation feasts, for at different times quantities of old weather-worn oyster shells have been exhumed in the court yard at the side of the garden in the rear, bearing mute testimony, if not to the aldermanic turtle, yet to the choice edible mollusks set before his worship's guests at these corporate banquets and "love-feasts," whose cost is carefully pricked down in the chamberlain's accounts. There is some good panelling in the upper apartments, and over the large open fireplace in one of the lower rooms are considerable remains of the royal arms and supporters of James the First. The fresco has been greatly damaged by the removal of the whitewash, the workman (a very careful man) not suspecting the existence of any decoration till he saw some slight remains of colour. The adjoining house is also a unique one in the same style. Opposite there is a wide passage through an old gabled house, and near by are several slender piers with rounded bases and carved caps, apparently of the 15th century, or possibly earlier, being similar to those at Salter's Hall and the Priory.

The "Bull Inn," situate near Ballingdon Bridge and the site of the Hospital of the Knights of S. John at Jerusalem (probably taking its sign from the heraldic bull of the De Clares, the lords of Sudbury), is another very fine specimen of the olden time, and the moulded and chamfered beams and rafters within are in capital preservation, and happily unsullied by whitewash. The original ponderous door remains, with the date 1693 cut deeply in one of the boards, not by a professional carver to mark a builder's date, but apparently by some enterprising amateur who wished to try the strength of his pocket knife on the oaken plank. In demolishing several years since some of the neighbouring houses to widen the Suffolk approach to the bridge, a 14th century timbered ceiling was discovered, and later ceilings of wood and plaster, the latter boldly conceived in reticulated patterns were recently found in a house adjoining the Inn, taken down in 1886.

All Saints' Vicarage, pleasantly located in its quiet, green, tree-embowered "God's acre," with large well planted garden, and grassy court yard in the rear, though now considerably altered and enlarged, was standing in the time of Cromwell, and was described as a "good house" in the time of Charles the First. The large hall, with its oak panelling and carved dado, with busts and flowers of the time of Charles II., the wide oaken staircase, moulded beams and joists, and low ceiled "study," are conspicuous features of this interesting old ecclesiastical dwelling, where, probably, from the time of the Conquest the "parson" of the parish lived, and worked, and studied, ministering at fast and festival, at quiet matins and sweet evensong, in his noble old church of All Souls hard by.

In Church Street are several good 17th century houses, partly bricked, and in Friars' Street, opposite Priory Walk, is a double gabled tenement belonging to the "Old Meeting" Trustees, with wide entrance passage, studded walls and clustered chimney-stacks, formerly the "Bell Inn." A late inhabitant, interested and versed in local history and architecture, Mr. Abishai Green, stated there



OLD HOUSE, FORMERLY THE BELL INN, SUDBURY.

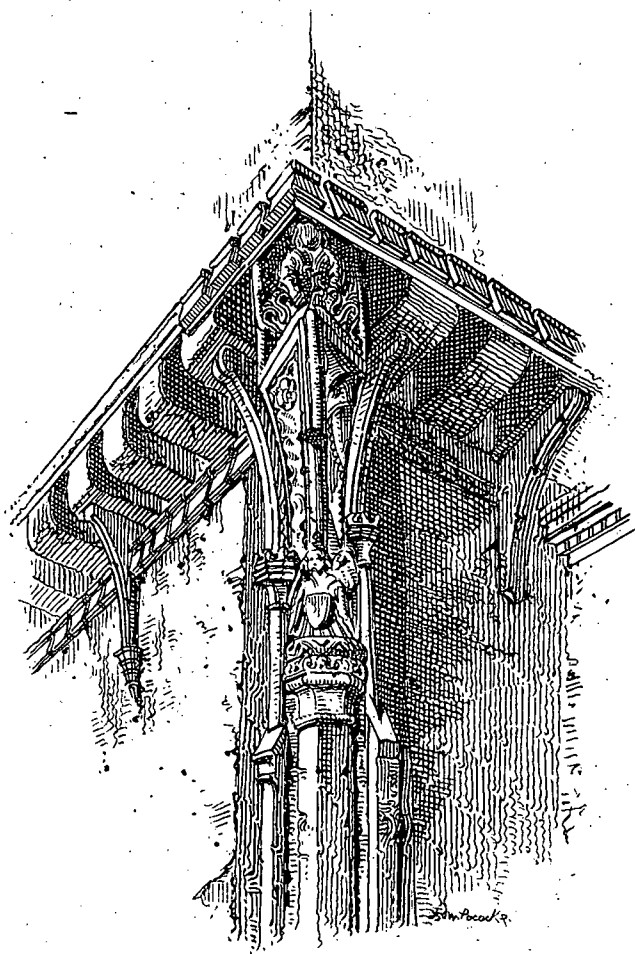
was a good painting beneath the whitewash over one of the fireplaces, whether on wood or in distemper he did not say.

A little further up the street, several carved pilasters and an overhanging story, with other signs bespeak an old house, and a massive wall of rubble, thin bricks and flints denote the enclosure to a once important edifice. Here formerly stood the Priory, founded 1272, which was ruthlessly demolished by a modern Vandal about 1740, though it was in excellent preservation, and had an extensive and imposing elevation, with wide bay and other windows with stone mullions and sculptured lintels. Dr. Holden's garden front of his capital red-bricked two and a half century old house, with its gables, high-pitched roof, and other details, deserves an inspection.

Opposite the entrance to Station Road, leading from Friars' Street to the railway station, is an old house now known as the *Anchor*, but formerly the *White Hart*, taking its sign from the supporters of Richard II., who was crowned by Abp. Sudbury, and who, as the boy-king and subsequently was the intimate friend of Robert de Vere, the 9th Earl of Oxford, of Hedingham Castle, whose evil influence and example did the infatuated monarch much harm. At this old hostel, Rowland Taylor, the Hadleigh Marian Martyr, stayed a night, on his way from London to his death on Aldham Common in 1555. Several houses in Friars' Street were wool-halls, or the residences of well-to-do clothiers and wool staplers (*e.g.* those now occupied by Messrs. Making, Anderton, and Rowe), and retain their wide oaken staircases and carved balusters, &c., panelled walls (papered), large cellars, wide chimnies, and other characteristic features of the houses of the period. There are interesting features in the house of Mr. Ransom, the town clerk, not the least of which are two old oaken doors, the panels completely covered with quaint carvings and floriated designs boldly conceived and executed, which would repay careful inspection. There are some good panelled rooms in houses in Sepulchre Street (Mr.

Moody's, &c.), and at Messrs. Rice's, a year or two back, was discovered extensive fresco wall ornamentation of rather crude execution and not very harmonious colours. Some good fleet Jacobean carving, but much mutilated, was found beneath the plaster on the bressumer-plate at the recent alterations at the new post office. There is a good corner-post, with an angel bearing a shield, at the entrance to Plough Lane. A capital timbered house in Stour Street, which was for a lengthened period the residence of the Humphry family, where the late Prebendary Humphry, of S. Martin's-in-the-Fields, and his brother, Dr. Humphry, of Cambridge, were brought up, was recently restored and refronted by the late Mr. Armes, of Lynn, whose family now occupy the house.

Our itinerary has occupied more time than we intended, and yet there are several architectural "bits" in the lanes, courts, and yards, we should have liked to sketch, but enough has been pointed out to verify our opening remarks that Sudbury is an interesting town in many respects, and not the least so with regard to its old-timbered houses and antiquarian remnants of two and three hundred years ago.



ANGEL POST, PLOUGH LANE, SUDBURY.