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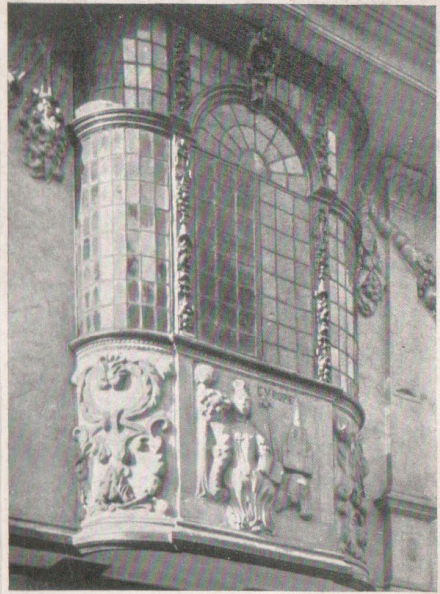
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**Ye Ancient
House at Ipswich**

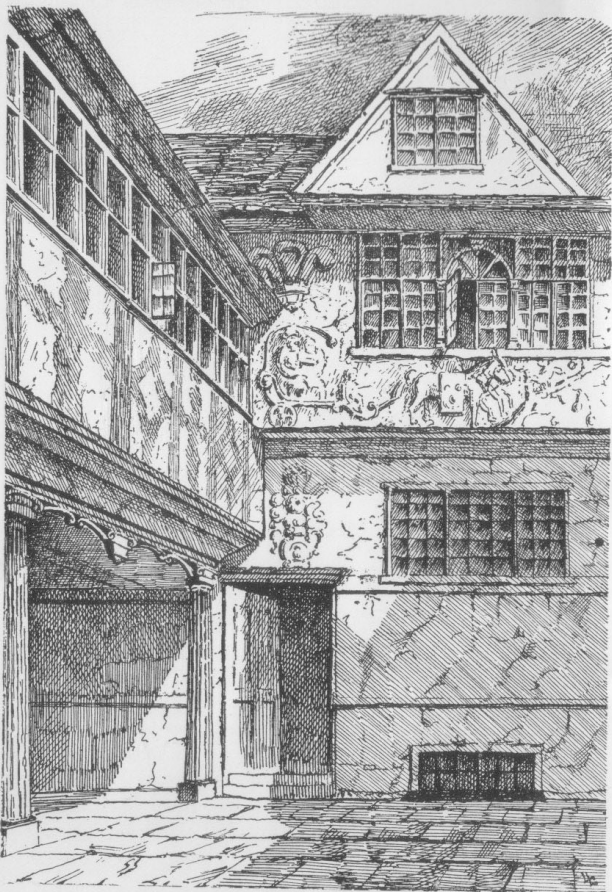
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Ye Ancient House at Ipswich.

By FRANK WOOLNOUGH, F.R.MET.S.

W. E. HARRISON,
THE ANCIENT HOUSE PRESS, IPSWICH.



THE COURTYARD.



The Ancient House, Ipswich in 1567.

Ipswich Ancient House.

IPSWICH is fortunate in the fact that the finest specimen of domestic English architecture of the sixteenth century, standing in one of the main thoroughfares, has been carefully preserved through the passing ages, and stands to-day practically untouched save by the mellowing hand of time. The quaintly ornamented front, with its bold bay windows and pointed gables, attracts the attention and excites the curiosity of visitors, and closer inspection will be found to yield much pleasure to the antiquarian and the archæologist.

The Ancient House, to give it the name by which it is familiarly known, or Sparrowe's House, as it formerly was, was erected when Elizabeth was Queen of England, and in the three-and-a-half centuries which have elapsed, legend, history and romance have become so interwoven that it is an almost impossible task to disentangle them at the present day.

The house as it now stands dates from the year 1567, but the architecture of parts of the exterior points to the fact that some portion at least is the remains of a structure belonging to the previous century. The town at this time contained a number of wealthy merchants,

and it is probable that the house was built by George Copping ; but a few years later it became the property and residence of Mr. Robert Sparrowe, a bailiff or port man of Ipswich, to whose descendants it belongs at the present day. This long unbroken possession in one family probably accounts for the excellent preservation of the building. The house is a brick and timber structure with a frontage of about seventy feet on the south side of the old Butter Market, extending for a considerable distance along St. Stephen's Lane on the west, from which thoroughfare there is a courtyard entrance. The two frontages are extremely rich in ornamentation ; the ground floor in the Butter Market is divided into a series of eleven richly carved oak-framed windows, with two doorways, above which for the entire length are carved pendant strings of fruit and foliage. Careful examination reveals the fact that the doorways do not occupy their original positions, but their removal has in no way altered the character of the elevation.

The first floor has five bay windows, four of which are on the front and one upon the west side, fitted with round topped leaded lights, the entire façade being richly ornamented in pargetting or decorated plaster work in high relief. This was a form of decoration somewhat freely used in the early Elizabethan days, but few well-preserved specimens remain. An old house in the Market Place at Newark, some few at Chester, and the Ancient House at Ipswich, are probably amongst the best remaining examples.

of the brother of this Mrs. Lane, at Bentley, in Staffordshire, that King Charles found refuge, and from there was conveyed, in the disguise of a servant, to the port of Bristol, whence he escaped to the Continent. Those interested in historical romance, of which the Stuart days were so full, should read the "King's Ransom," written by a member of the Sparrowe family, in which the episode of the Monarch and his connections with the Ancient House is dealt with in a charming manner.

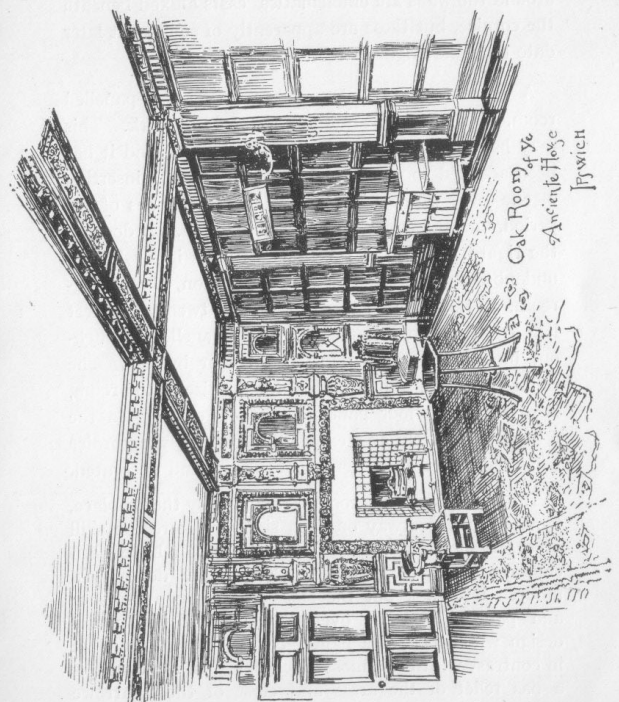
The roof of the house is somewhat unusual ; originally no chimneys were visible from the front, and the overhang is of such a width that it admits of a safe promenade, and gabled windows break the monotony, corresponding in number to the bays beneath, ornamented in pargetting with grotesque cupids in various attitudes.

The interior of the house is but little less extraordinary than the exterior, and it contains some extremely fine and beautifully decorated rooms.

About eighty years ago the last members of the Sparrowe family removed from Ipswich. Since this time the building has been adapted to business purposes, but fortunately, owing to careful and appreciative hands into which it has fallen, it has suffered but slight deterioration, none of the essential characteristics having been interfered with. The present shop, or part of it was probably the entrance hall, to which there was access both from the front and the courtyard.

The pargetting ornamentation in the present case is emblematical. Beneath the windows on the front are given representations of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, quaint, but perfectly representative of the conventional ideas of the period. On the west front is a figure of Atlas, with long flowing beard, supporting the globe, and a pastoral scene, consisting of a figure seated beneath a tree surrounded by a flock of sheep, while a shepherd is seen approaching with crook and hat in hand, accompanied by another flock of sheep. This, it is presumed, bears reference to the wool trade, which was the staple produce of the district, and of which Ipswich was the centre both for home consumption and export to the Continent. The walls of the courtyard also bear representations of a similar nature.

Conspicuous above the main doorway are the Royal Arms of King Charles II., the Sparrowe family being ardent Royalists. Furthermore, a tradition exists, descending from father to son, that through the agency of one of the family, Charles II. lay some time concealed in this retreat after the troublous times immediately following the battle of Worcester. Be this as it may, there was undoubtedly a close if somewhat mysterious connection between the Sparrowe family and the then reigning house of Stuart. A magnificent full-length portrait of Charles II. adorned the dining-room ; amongst the most treasured possessions of the Sparrowe family are two miniatures, one of the Monarch and the other of Mrs. Lane, the deliverer of the King from captivity. It was in the house



The ceiling has an oval ornament centre-piece, and around the walls are emblematical casts affixed beneath the cornice, but these are apparently of somewhat later date than the original decorations.

A descent of two steps leads to an oak-panelled room, with carved overmantel of Jacobean work. This may have been a library or breakfast-room, and it has been adapted to modern requirements by the insertion of one large window in place of two small ones of the period, and the panelling has been painted. A door on the right-hand side of the fireplace leads into what is, undoubtedly, the treasure of the Mansion, the dining-room, a spacious apartment measuring twenty-two feet long by twenty-one feet wide, closely panelled throughout in oak, toned to a full rich colour by age. The ceiling, perhaps, somewhat low for the size of the room, is divided into four panels by beams crossing in the centre, elaborately and exquisitely carved, the cornice being supported by oaken pillars fluted and decorated.

The north side of the room is occupied by the fireplace, flanked by a doorway on each side, and here the skill of the designer and craft of the workman have been employed to good purpose. One of the doors is a modern insertion, but the sides of the open fireplace and panelling of the overmantel, inlaid in fanciful design with wood of a lighter colour, has a fine effect in contrast with the almost black oak. In the centre is a bas relief of the arms and crest of the Sparrowe family, with monogram embracing the letters I.S.W., with the date 1603, I.S., standing for John Sparrowe, and W. for Wilding, the maiden name of his wife.

The courtyard, though of small dimensions, is interesting. On the west side the arcading remains intact, and it can be traced also on the south side, although partially hidden by the building of a modern entrance hall. Above, however, there still remain the entire series of heavy mullioned windows, with small leaded panes, lighting the corridor, whence the sleeping apartments are reached.

The cellars are entered by a flight of steps from the courtyard, and are spacious and substantially fashioned, the building above being supported by gothic arches, beyond which there is little to note. The gardens attached to the mansion formerly extended to the Church of St. Stephen, which stands behind.

Proceeding by the broad staircase to the first floor, the chief room to attract attention is the withdrawing room, forty-six feet long by twenty-one feet wide, a truly noble room, with its deeply recessed circular bay windows, still bearing their quaintly leaded panes. The ceiling is traversed by massive beams, and divided into compartments ornamented in plaster moulding by enormous festoons of foliage and fruit. This apartment, like the dining-room, was well furnished with portraits and works of art. The general appearance of this room lends itself to romance, and it requires but little effort of the imagination to people it with figures of men and dames in the gay costumes of the days of the Merrie Monarch. What revels have been held within those walls, what plots hatched perchance, for

It was in this room that the portrait of Charles II. was hung, which Wodderspoon attributes to Vandyke, but as Vandyke died when Charles was but 11 years old, this is incorrect. This picture is now in the possession of Mrs. Donkin, the authoress of "The King's Ransom," by whom it is attributed to an artist named Stone, but believed to have been painted from life. Here were also members of the Sparrowe family by Sir Peter Lely and other artists, and one, a likeness of John Sparrowe, who had been thirteen times Bailiff of Ipswich, painted by Gainsborough. Other valuable pictures which adorned the mansion were, a portrait of Judge Clench, of the Court of Common Pleas, who had married Dorcas Sparrowe, this was by Holbein; a full length portrait of George I., by G. Fountaine, presented by that Monarch in return for attention received from Mr. Sparrowe during his visit to Ipswich. There was also a portrait of Henrietta Maria, the Consort of Charles I., by Vandyke, one of John Sparrowe, slain in the battle of Hexham, and of John Eddowes Sparrowe, who was the father of thirty-two children, which portrait was painted by Sir Peter Lely. Many of the pictures, however, have passed out of the hands of the Sparrowe family, and their present whereabouts is unknown.

Passing from the dining-room, the door on the right hand side leads to a passage where is inserted in the wall a series of old Dutch tiles, representing Pallas and Mars, which tiles were the original lining to one of the fireplaces.

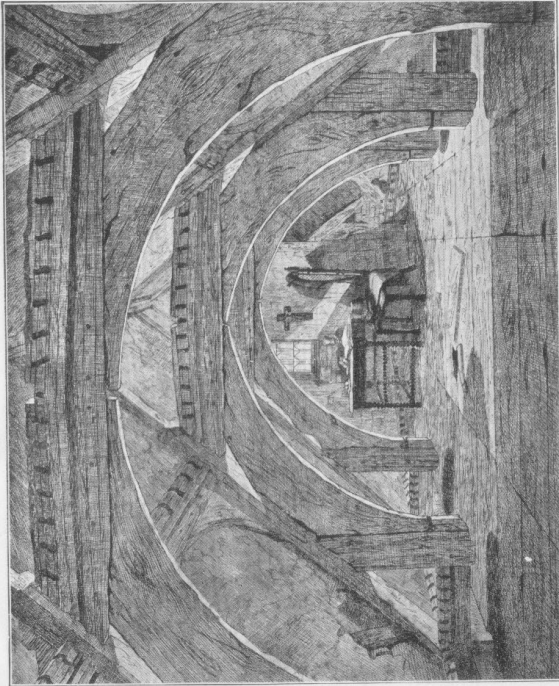
those were troublous times those Stuart days, the Royalists, were frequently passing to and fro to the continent, and Ipswich lay near and handy to the port of embarkation and the trusty supporters of the Sparrowe family could be depended on to entertain in secret the royal messengers when needed. Probably could the old mansion tell its own tale, the truth would be found stranger and more romantic than all the fiction that may be, or has been, woven into story round its walls.

Leading from the east end of the drawing room through an oak-panelled door is a smaller apartment with Tudor fire-place.

From the landing a small thoroughfare room leads to the corridor and sleeping apartments, this room also has massive ceiling beams, but the ornamentation is less elaborate than that of the drawing room.

From the far end of the landing another staircase leads to the second floor, this is lighted by another of the curious round leaded windows previously referred to in the lower part of the house, and the quaintly fashioned wooden balustrades of the staircase still remain.

This attic story is typical of the domestic architecture of the Elizabethan period, with heavy beams, sloping



ANCIENT CHAPEL IN THE ROOF

ceilings, and lighted by four dormer windows seen from the street. In the year 1801 a singular discovery was accidentally made of an apartment which had been closed up and entirely lost sight of and forgotten for a great number of years. Some repairs to the fabric being necessary, a portion of the wall was removed to facilitate access by the workman to the under side of the roof, when a concealed loft was revealed which had previously formed the upper portion of a chapel or oratory, the body of which existed in the room immediately beneath. The arched timbers in the roof bear traces of ornamentation; there is but one small window, so placed that it is nowhere visible from the street, and when first entered there were found stored therein wooden angels and other figures such as usually decorate a Catholic place of worship.

The supposition is that the chapel existed in its entirety up to the time of the Reformation, but after that date the open assumption of the proscribed faith becoming dangerous, the oratory was converted into a sitting-room, a floor was placed midway and ceiled below, the timbered roof was effectively hidden and eventually forgotten, and thus lay unknown through several generations.

The accompanying illustration is a copy of an old engraving, published more than half a century ago, from a drawing of the apartment by the late Claude Lorraine Nursey.

For the past eighty years the house has been used for business premises, but has fortunately sustained but little damage from its commercial occupation. In the hands of the present proprietor, Mr. W. E. Harrison, it is even more carefully preserved, all the machinery consequent to a printing and publishing business having been removed to new premises erected at the rear. The various rooms herein described may be seen upon application, and will certainly afford pleasure to those whose taste for archæology leads them to desire a closer acquaintance with one of the most interesting relics of the sixteenth century remaining in the town.

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