

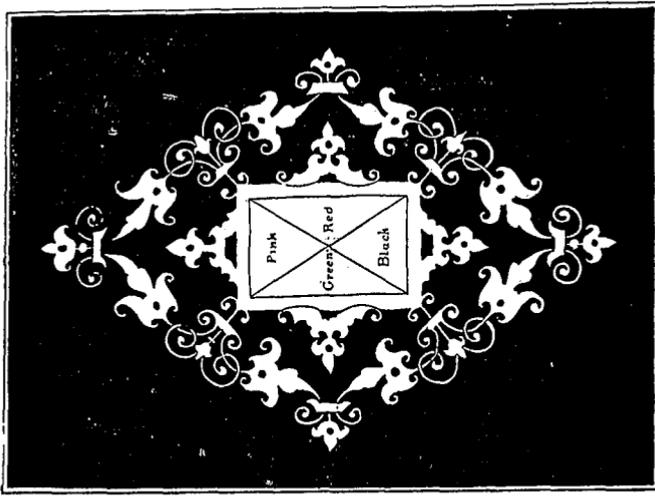
A HOUSE IN ROCHESTER HIGH STREET,
NUMBERED 69 AND 71.

BY THE REV. S. W. WHEATLEY, M.A., F.S.A.

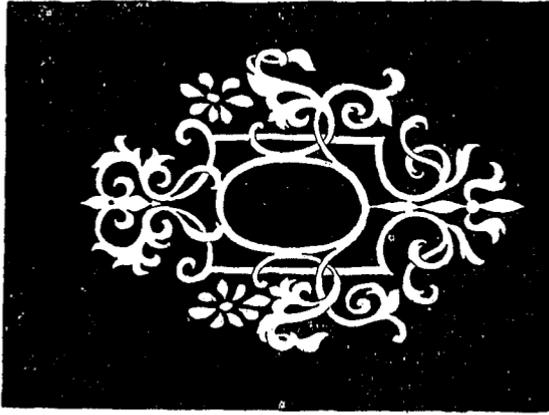
THE antiquity of Rochester main street—part of Watling Street—has been recalled in an interesting manner during the recent alterations carried out in Messrs. Lloyd's, the bankers, premises, situated nearly opposite St. William's Alley, which leads to the Cathedral north transept. While digging away earth below the then basement level to secure ampler strong-room accommodation, the workman, eight feet down, came upon a Roman tile placed over a broken Roman earthenware bowl, about four inches high and of darkish brown colour; and close by he also found a fragment of the rim of another Roman bowl, seemingly of Upchurch ware. In further digging in the cellar a stone was unearthed, bearing the well-known lattice-pattern carving characteristic of Bishop Ernulf's work in the Cathedral opposite. It may be conjectured that it found its way hither at the rebuilding of the Cathedral presbytery and choir between 1200 and 1225, when much refuse stone work would be cast aside. Beside the alterations below the street level, the whole of the interior ground-floor of the premises had to be remodelled to secure a large, spacious banking office, with a manager's room behind. This necessitated the removal of the ground-floor domestic arrangements which still survived at the eastern side. In doing this, the fine Georgian staircase with its elegantly worked balustrading had to be removed and reconstructed at the back of the bank on the eastern side. This has been done with the utmost care and very successfully. While the above-named, with other work throughout the house, was being carried out, much of an old timber house, which had been cased in by the present Georgian house, was revealed. Of special

interest, perhaps, was one remaining oak jamb of a moulded doorway on the east side. It had an unusual quatre-foil panel above a stop carving of a thistle shape; the latter, however, was much damaged. This post has been preserved.

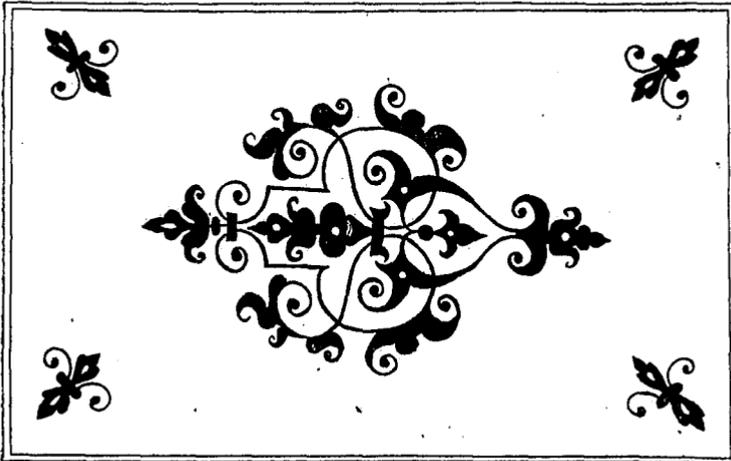
But the important find in this reconstruction work, and one that calls for appreciation of and gratitude to the contractor, Mr. Webb, and his foreman for their quick perception in the matter, was some fine and unusual painted wall panelling. It would appear that when the Georgian reconstruction of the building was carried out the panelling from three rooms, which seemed sound and able to be used again, was pieced together so as to panel two rooms on the first floor overlooking the garden. Two doors, each 6 ft. 1 in. high by 2 ft. 1½ in. in width, were also preserved, and were used as cupboard doors on the landings. This having been done, the panelling was covered with an uniform coat of paint, and probably in later years with more paint. When these coats of paint were being burnt off, painting below them appeared, which did not yield to this burning process. The matter was looked into, with the result that through the appreciation of the value of the find by the architect, Mr. Maufe, and through the keen interest of Mr. Pitt, the bank manager, the whole of the panelling of these two rooms and of the two cupboard doors was very carefully stripped of its coats of paint, revealing the most charming Elizabethan or early Jacobean decoration of three distinct patterns: the one pattern an amber ground with black painting; the other, darkish brown with creamy white decoration enclosing a small rectangular centre, either party-coloured red and green or painted to resemble dark green marble; and the third, of which only one or two specimens remain and those much injured, darkish brown with creamy decoration round a red-coloured oval. The panels, painted in tempera, vary slightly in size, as is noted in the excellent drawings kindly made by Miss Iona Graham and reproduced in this article. Painted panelwork of the kind described is sufficiently rare to be worth recording wherever it occurs. Some panels of a somewhat similar type to those at Rochester



White on Paper/Black Ground



White on Paper/Black Ground



Black on White Ground

PAINTED PANELS IN A HOUSE IN HIGH STREET, ROCHESTER.

Note.—All three are reproduced to the same scale.

exist in a ground-floor room in the south wing of Hollingbourne Manor House. In this case they have been carefully restored from the remains of the original decoration which survived. They are all of one design, and are executed on the natural surface of the oak in gold, which gives a fine and delicate effect as of filigree.

The earlier history of the structure under notice at Rochester is not known, but, as a timbered house, it has a place in English history, owing to its association with the ill-fated monarch James II. It is probable that James II. slept here, as the guest of Sir Richard Head, on Saturday, 14 December 1688,* after coming from Faversham, where he had experienced much unpleasant treatment. Macaulay speaks of him thus: "He was in a pitiable state. Not only was his understanding, which had never been very clear, altogether bewildered, but the personal courage which, when a young man, he had shewn in several battles, both by sea and by land, had forsaken him."†

From Rochester he went to Whitehall, and then to Ham near Richmond, which he found too damp. He returned to Rochester to Sir Richard Head's house on 17 December. A day or two he spent here in hesitancy, being urged by Lord Clarendon not to leave the kingdom. "Fright," says Macaulay, "overpowered every other feeling. James determined to depart, and it was easy for him to do so. He was negligently guarded, all persons were suffered to repair to him, vessels ready to put to sea lay at no great distance, and their boats might come close to the garden of the house in which he lodged The arrangements were expeditiously made. On the evening of Saturday the twenty-second the King assured some of the gentlemen, who had been sent from London with intelligence and advice, that he would see them again in the morning. He went to bed, rose at dead of night, and, attended by Berwick, stole out at the back door and went through the garden to the shore of the Medway. A small skiff was in waiting.

* *Strut, Political History of England*, vol. viii, p. 297.

† *History of England*, vol. iii, p. 315.

Soon after the dawn of Sunday the fugitives were on board of a smack which was running down the Thames.”*

The family of Head seems to have given up possession of this house on the death of Sir Richard, for his grandson Sir Francis Head, who succeeded to the title owing to his father's previous death, resided and died in Canterbury and was buried in St. Mildred's Church. The family of Head was still associated for many years with the neighbourhood owing to their possessions at Higham, the great Hermitage belonged to them, and to their being owners of the rectorial tithe of St. Margaret's, Rochester. In recent years two members of the family rose to positions of distinction. Sir Francis Bond Head, Bart., descended through the female line, was Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, 1835—37, and Sir Edmund Walker Head was Governor-General of Canada, 1854—61. A fine monument with a bust of Sir Richard Head is in the great south transept of the Cathedral of Rochester, where are also several other memorials of the family.

The title-deeds of the property, very courteously placed at the service of the present writer by Messrs. Lloyd's Bank, do not shew when the Georgian alterations of the timbered-house were carried out, but from them we learn that Alderman Edward Dyne had a forty years' lease in 1793 of garden, stable and buildings which were part of the "city estate," and were situated on "Part of the Town Ditch" outside the line of the old city wall. By this time the premises numbered 65 and 67 High Street were built at the north-western corner of what had formerly belonged to Sir Richard Head's mansion. When "John Amhurst, Esq^{re}," and Mary Amhurst were occupants of this house and grounds in 1804, a brew-house was one of its out-buildings. On 22 June, two years previously, the Dean, Dr. Goodenough, and Chapter of the Cathedral demised unto Thomas Edwards, Esq., for £198 16s. 0d. their land tax, which produced a yearly rent of 10s. to their corporate funds.

* *History of England*, vol. iii, pp. 334-5.

In 1855 the old Rochester Bank of Messrs. Day and Nicholson occupied the building. In 1862 a shop-front was made in the western half of the frontage. In a conveyance and assignment to Mr. Chas. A. Cobb of High Street, Strood, draper, the premises are spoken of for the first time as "Suffolk House," and this name appears on the bill-of-sale in 1898. The name seems purely fanciful. In 1900 the Capital and Counties Bank became possessed of it, and "the shop-front" made away for a Portland stone frontage, which now in turn has been displaced, and Mr. Maufe has devised a simple and pleasant ground-floor frontage, agreeably harmonious with the upper floors.