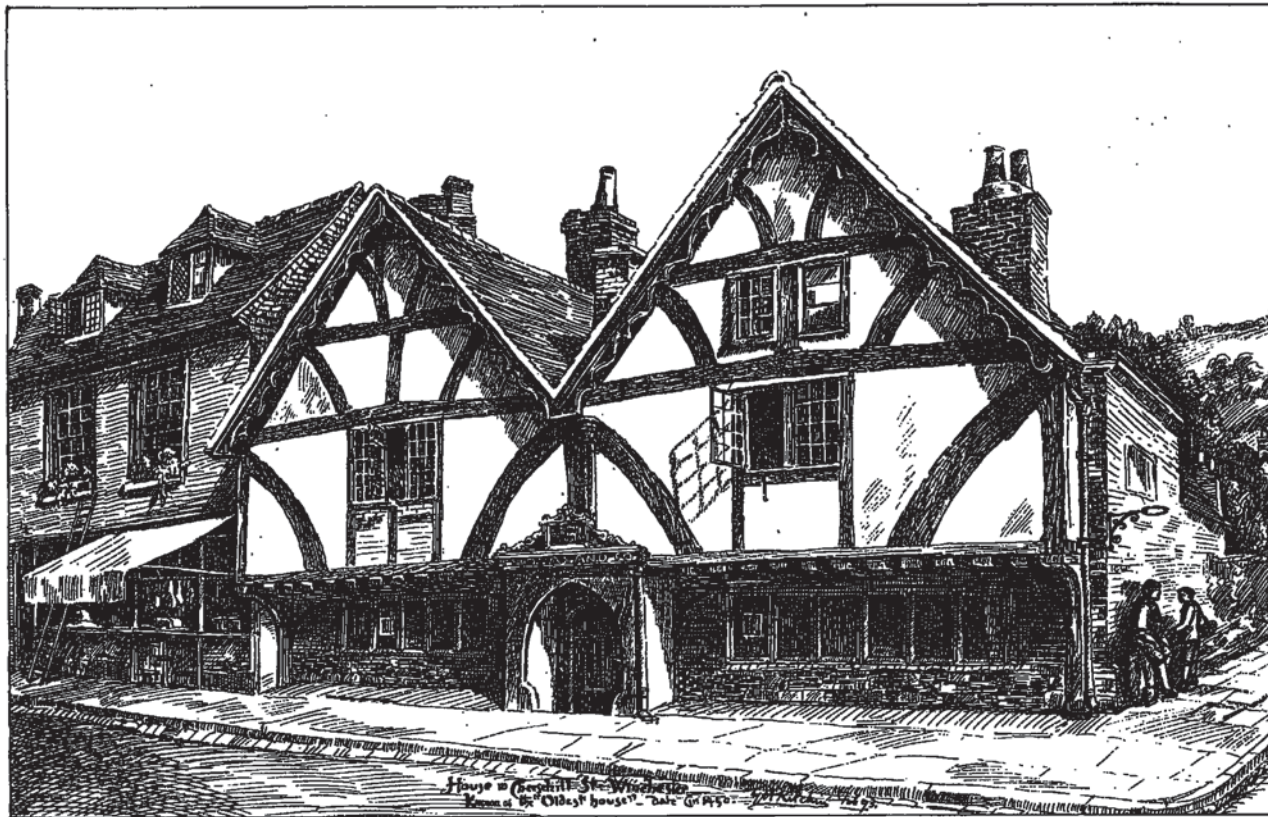


HANTS FIELD CLUB. 1892.



G. H. KITCHIN, DELT.

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OLD HOUSE, CHEESEHILL STREET, WINCHESTER.

THE OLD HOUSE IN CHEESEHILL STREET, WINCHESTER.

By G. H. KITCHIN.



BEFORE RESTORATION.

This interesting building, of which an illustration is here given, dates from about the year 1450, and stands in a district of the city known as the "Soke,"¹ formerly under the jurisdiction of the Bishops of Winchester. Outside the protection of the city walls, it was a favourite place of residence in mediæval times and thickly populated, owing to the less heavy tolls and taxes. The name of the street "Cheesehill," is in itself of interest, being a corruption of the old word "Chesol" or "Chesil,"² meaning a beach. The same word is used in its original form in the name of the terrible "Chesil Bank" on

¹ "Soke" is derived from the Anglo-Saxon *sōc*, the liberty of a *soke* or local court, independent of other jurisdiction.

² "Chessil," gravel or pebbles; "Chessil," a bank of sand, Kennett MS., 1033. "Chesly's," pebbles on the sea shore; Cov. Mys. p. 56.

the coast of Dorsetshire, just beyond the Isle of Portland. This name indicates that here was formerly the old bank or beach of the river Itchen, once of much greater volume than now. The "Strand" in London is a name of similar origin.

Of the history of the "Oldest House" little can be gathered. It must have been the dwelling of some well-to-do citizen, though built during a period of great depression in the history of the city, judging from the petitions and lamentations of the townspeople at that time. It is said to have been taken as Rectory House to St. Peter's, Cheesehill, at the time of the Reformation. The house subsequently fell in the world—was divided about 100 years ago into two separate tenements—narrowly escaped destruction when the entrance was made to the new Great Western Railway Station, and was finally condemned by the City authorities as "unfit for human habitation."

In order to save this most interesting specimen of a mediæval town house, very few examples of which are to be seen in the streets of Winchester owing to, sieges and fires in past times, it was taken by Messrs. Thomas and Co., wood carvers, &c., of Winchester, with a view to turning it into a showroom and store for old furniture, and the result of their restorations has far exceeded the promise given by the appearance of the house when first acquired. It was then entirely covered by a coating of plaster and the ground floor walls had been built out level with the gables above in order to give more room within. The whole place was almost in the last state of dirt and dilapidation, but it has been faithfully restored by Messrs. Thomas' men under the direction of the author of this notice, architect of the firm.

The decayed roofs and timbers were made good, the dividing partitions were all removed, and the old oak doorways with arched heads unblocked. Above and hidden by the rotten ceilings were found the original oak boards and joists which have been cleaned and left exposed to view as in former times. The plaster on the gables, neatly marked with lines to represent blocks of stone was stripped off, disclosing the splendid oak timber work, which had been left hidden beneath. Most of the old gables in this and other towns have been covered over in the same way, the result of a curious mania

for making old things look new, which perhaps to a certain extent still exists, and is unhappily not confined to domestic buildings. The picturesque old half timbered houses at the entrance to the Close are examples of this, having been entirely covered with cement. They were restored to their original beauty by the Dean a few years ago, and the wood work brought to light in this case was found to be composed of old ships timbers.

To the architect the old Cheesehill house is very interesting, as it shows, now that the plaster has been removed both from within and without, the mode of construction; that it was first completely framed together with massive oak beams and then the interstices filled in with brickwork below and lath and plaster above.

On removing the plaster ceilings of the ground floor rooms the position of the original front of the building was discovered nearly three feet back, with the ends of the old beams that supported the floor above, sawn off in the wall. These were with some difficulty removed and fresh beams inserted (of old timber) and the front set back as formerly. Judging from the brackets under these beams it is very possible that it originally was one of the open fronted shops from which the master and his "prentices" cried their wares.

In Tudor and earlier times this was the district where lived the cloth workers, serge weavers, wool staplers, fullers, linen weavers, and others whose names are extant, among them a "boke bynder," one Henry Crocker, who flourished in the eight year of the Virgin Queen. Who lived in this house and what trades have been carried on by the various tenants are questions difficult to solve. There is a curious opening some nine feet wide with brackets under the lintel, between the entrance passage and the principal right hand room. This was bricked up, and when opened out, shewed the sockets for inserting a moveable horizontal bar, about three feet from the floor. This feature, the purpose of which is at present undetermined, may possibly afford some clue to the pursuit of trade or a former inhabitant. In the large room above was held, about a hundred years ago, the first Sunday School in Winchester, begun by a pious shoemaker named Adams, and entirely carried on by the private

efforts of this good man. This old house, has therefore additional interest as the birthplace (as far as Winchester is concerned) of what has now become a national institution and controverts the theory that the trade of shoemaking has a bad spiritual effect.

Although not to be compared with the elaborate half-timber houses in Shropshire and elsewhere, this specimen of ancient domestic architecture has yet an impressive character of its own from the simplicity of its arrangement, the size of its timbers and the quaint bee-hive-like arched porch, with a massive inner door ("clinker-built," as the nautical phrase expresses it) and, now that the restoration is complete, it forms one of the many points of interest in the old city.

