

SOME EARLY PARGETTING WORK

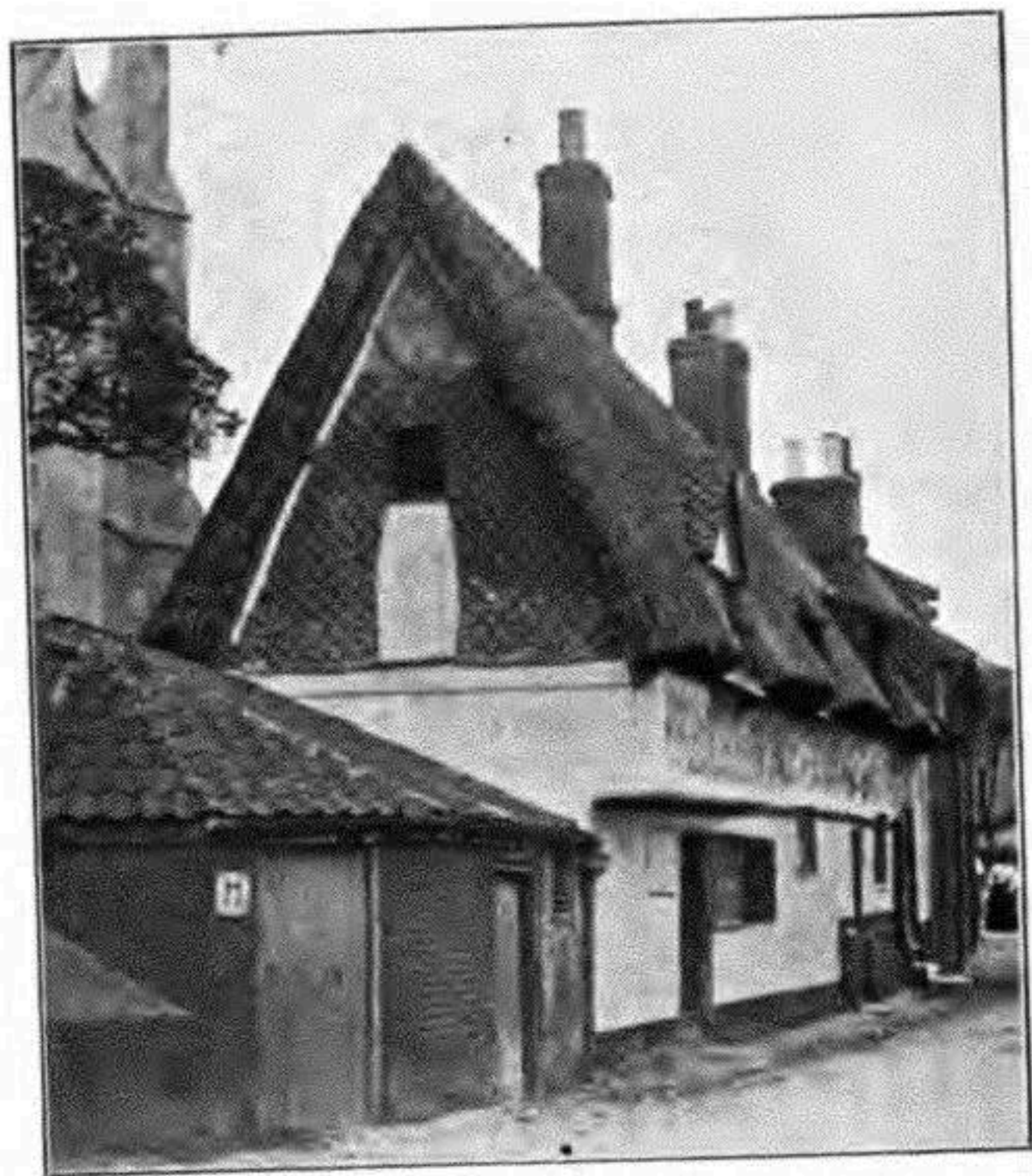
at Bonner's Cottages, East Dereham,

BY

WILLIAM ARGENT.

THE houses generally known as Bonner's cottages, and built in 1502, was so named because Bishop Bonner was supposed to have resided there. But there is no evidence of this being so, and it is more probable that it was the Guildhall of one of the minor guilds. It was bought last year by Mr. Walter Rye, who entrusted me with its restoration, and has suggested I should write a description of the work for this periodical. Many people are disposed to doubt the statement that plaster in some form or another ranks amongst the earliest forms of building materials. Yet the fact is incontestible, and is vouched for by the many extant remains in many parts of the country. Bonner's house is situate at the south-east corner of the parish churchyard of St. Nicholas, and shows some fine examples of the early external decorative plaster work of a very quaint design, and I much doubt if there is anything to be seen approaching this design elsewhere in East Anglia. Two fine examples, but entirely different in design, are to be seen at Clare in Suffolk, 1473, and also at Sparrow's House, ("The Ancient House,") Ipswich, 1683, the one being done

much earlier, and the other much later than the period in which Bonner's house was supposed to have been erected. The primitive method of plastering, before lime came into general use, was with mud or clay, and the rudest forms of plastering were structures composed of wattles, or, in other words, reeds or sticks, and a coating of plaster daubed over them to keep out the cold and wet. Hence, from this we derive the term daubers. It will also be advisable to here mention that in those days there were two distinct classes of workmen, (*i.e.*), the plasterer's proper, or Pargettors as they were named, and the Daubers or inferior plasterers, the difference between the two is this, the former men executed the ornamental work, whilst the latter, the Daubers, executed the clay work only, Bonner's house is built entirely of this clay work and overlaid with a coating of plaster composed of lime, and sand, with a plentiful supply of cow hair added to render it tough and strong, and also to ensure good hanging powers, and I am of opinion that a large quantity of calcined bone or marble dust was added to this plaster as it is of a very hard and tough nature, which is only met with in the ancient plasters and mortars. The chief glories of Bonner's house are its superbly decorated front panels and its ancient tiled gable. But before going further, it will be as well to say something about the construction of this very ancient edifice, I am firmly convinced that Bonner's house was built in two separate parts. The portion nearest the church gates being built first, whilst the portion which contains the tiled gable being added at a much later period. There are several strong points which make this feasible, firstly, the doorway, which at one time was the main entrance to the building not being in the centre of the present building, secondly, the entirely different designing of the two front panels, and thirdly, the most conclusive and important reason of all is,



that running up in the roof in a direct line with the centre band which separates the two front panels, is a gable undoubtedly the original one. In this gable, are the openings from which the windows in the present gable were taken and placed where they now are, also the timber framing to which the tiles were attached remains intact. There is one other item worthy of mention to support the above, and that is, the oak sill which carries the roof, runs about a foot past the centre band of front panels and to this still is spliced, the sill which carries the other half of roof. Had Bonner's house been built all at one time, this sill would have been jointed quite over the centre band and not past it. This all helps to convince one that Bonner's house was constructed in two different parts and at two different periods. I will now proceed to describe the difference between the Pargett work and the hand-wrought plaster work. Firstly, the work at Bonner's house has so often been mis-described as being Pargett work, whereas it is hand wrought work, which is entirely different to the pargetting.

Pargett work, as its name implies was executed in the following manner (*i.e.*), the plaster was applied, and whilst still soft, the designs were impressed into it by the means of stamps or dies, and in some cases, cut in. Pargett work is quite flat, whilst the hand-wrought work is invariably raised. The work at Bonner's house is hand-wrought, done entirely by hand with the aid of a few tools, but chiefly with nature's modelling tools, the fingers. In proof of this, after cleaning down the old work the finger prints upon it were clearly discernible.

We now come to the most interesting part of this article, namely, the two front panels already mentioned, and which differ entirely in design. We will take panel 1 first, this being the panel nearest the church

gates. Running along the centre of the panel is a serpentine scroll and branching out from this scroll, are the various decorations consisting of various grotesque forms of leaves, fruit, and foliage. This panel also contains the principal decorations amongst which is a very fine example of a swag (over the main doorway already mentioned). This swag is composed of various forms of flowers, fruit, and leaves amongst which the grape and pomegranate figure consecutively. The swag also terminates in two superb pendants on either side of doorway. These pendants also are made up of various shaped leaves, flowers, and fruit, similar to the swag. It will also be advisable to here say that the grape has been largely used in this panel as a form of decoration. The serpentine scroll terminates in a boss, circular in shape and composed entirely of pointed leaves overlapping each other. This panel also contains a four and a five-pointed star decoration, as well as several good minor decorations. The design of this panel is in what is known as the Jacobean style, whilst the panel to which we now proceed is in what is known as the Tudor style.

Panel 2 also contains a serpentine scroll, running along the centre and from this scroll, as in panel 1, there branches out the various decorations, consisting principally of leaves, the decorations in this panel are of a much more flatter nature than those of panel 1. The Tudor and white rose, intermixed with the grape decoration are used in this panel, also here it will be worthy of mention, that the Tudor rose occurs also in panel 1 in one or two places. But I am convinced that when panel 2 was added and decorated, the decorator placed them in panel 1, as I feel sure they were not there otherwise, as they would be entirely out of character with the design of panel 1. The scroll in panel 2 terminates at either end, also in a boss, but of an entirely different design to that of panel 1.

We will now turn to the very fine old gable, which contains a wreath inside of which is inscribed the date of erection MDII., and I should say that it was about that period when this latter portion was added to the original building, but as I have already mentioned, I am of the opinion that the first portion was erected much earlier than 1502, possibly about the time of the erection at Clare, Suffolk (1473), or even prior to that but of course I cannot determine definitely. The wreath above mentioned is made entirely of flat leaves which are pointed and overlap each other. The wreath in size is about 18 inches by 21 inches, and is oval in shape, but is broken at the top and bottom centres by branches of grape decoration. It is situate quite at the extreme peak end of the gable. Below the wreath are hung the ancient tiles which are most peculiar in shape. These tiles were manufactured by hand, or in other words were made in a mould. The Clay from which they were made is what is known as picked earth, and was dug out in the district possibly some where near the building. They are of a shape not often met with, and I have not in my great experience come across anything resembling them. They are oblong at top and semi-circular at bottom, also they are what is known as a shouldered tile, the peculiarity of these tiles is that one shoulder is much longer than the other. They are hung to the timber frame work of gable by the means of wooden pegs (oak) which are pushed through the two holes at the top of tile. Attached to the timber stud work are some riven oak splines transversely, and to these the tiles are hung as above described. There seems to be some doubt existing as to whether the gable above described was originally tiled, but, I am firmly convinced, that it was, from the discovery of the original gable already spoken of. Also on removing old tiles they were found to have been plastered at the back with a very strong and tough

coating of clay intermixed with fibre, and thus their shape was left on the clay work. This all helps to convince one that the gable was originally tiled. After the old tiles were removed, two windows were discovered, and these are undoubtedly those which were at one time in the other gable before-mentioned, and upon the other being built were transferred to it. The uppermost window is square in shape about 20 inches, whilst the lower (which is immediately beneath it) is peculiar in shape, being simply the shape of the pieces of oak as they were grown. The small window has been restored to its original condition whilst the larger one has again been plastered over. The gable terminates in another panel of about the same size as panel No. 2. This panel is pargetted in a plain design of diamond-shape, being impressed into the plaster whilst still in its soft state.

Before leaving this old and historic edifice there are one or two more items worthy of mention, namely, the fresco painting or colouring, also the three Dormer windows which still remain (or at least one remains) intact, the other two having had flat roofs substituted for the original pitch roof. The fresco which is in three colours runs along the whole length of the building as was customary to the finishing of this class of work in those days. The Dormers have tiled roofs of the same pattern tiles as those which were used upon the gable.