

UNUSUAL FIND AT SAFFRON WALDEN

PARGE-WORK (or ornamental plaster work) which once graced the external walls of many of the 16th and 17th century timber-framed houses of Saffron Walden has largely disappeared, having been destroyed by later builders who did not appreciate its merits.

Apart from the exceptional examples remaining on the Sun Inn (and some 19th century imitations) and the former "Dolphin" in Gold Street, there is little left for us to admire. These two examples are of the mid-17th century.

Any new discovery, therefore, is of interest and during the restorations being undertaken at premises adjoining Messrs. Richard Henry's shop in George Street, Saffron Walden, a further example of very unusual type has come to light after having been hidden from view for about 150 years.

Unfortunately it is thickly covered by many coats of whitewash and though the general outline is clear, the details are difficult to make out. The large design consists of a shield of arms with crest and supporters (the left-hand supporter as seen by the viewer has largely gone) bordered on either side by fluted vertical columns or pilasters having decorated capitals, the whole being enclosed within a raised frame with a slightly arched head in the apex of which is a keystone.

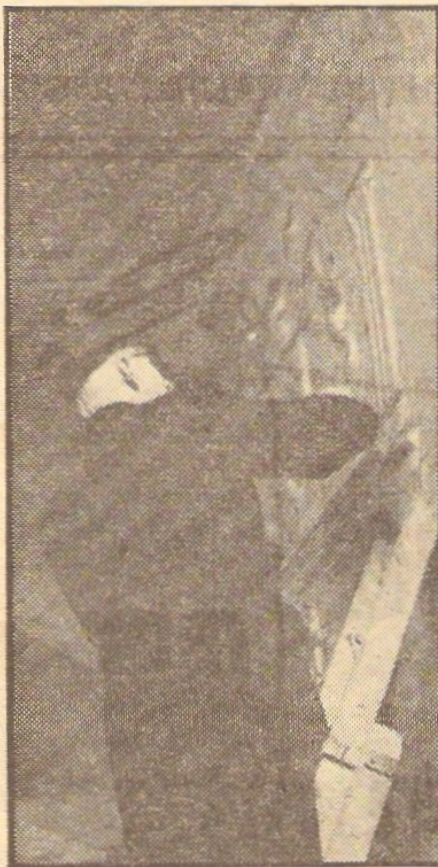
The shield is of the "flat-top" variety and, as the crest does not appear to include a helmet, the

arms are probably those of Queen Elizabeth I. The type of decoration used suggests the work may be dated to about 1580. If this is correct, then this is the earliest piece of parge-work remaining in the town. Part of the overlying whitewash was removed, disclosing the original surface underneath.

A curious feature is that the work seems to have formed part of an internal room decoration and may have been intended as a kind of reredos at one end, for on either side may be seen the sloping marks of an early roof of what may have been a hall-type house of the 15th century.

The Royal Arms of Queen Elizabeth are: England and France quarterly, i.e. the shield is divided into four parts and in the 1st and 4th quarter are the three Fleurs-de-Lys for France modern, and the three lions passant guardant in the 2nd and 3rd, for England. The Supporters are, dexter, a crowned Lion and, sinister, a winged Dragon. The Crest is a Royal crown without a helmet. The Supporters are the distinguishing feature — the Dragon being peculiar to the Tudors.

P. G. M. Dickinson.



Mr. Dickinson makes a close inspection of the discovery.