



A CERTAIN melancholy interest attaches to this house, for it stands condemned. Not in the least because it is unfit for habitation—far from that: but because it is in the line of a street-widening scheme. The corner of Church Street where it stands is awkward and narrow, undoubtedly a dangerous corner for motorists, more than one of whom have run into the pollarded trees that stand as a protecting row in front of it. Necessary though the road widening may be, however, one cannot help deeply regretting that so delightful a house of Queen Anne's day should be swept away. Actually the line of the proposed widened roadway passes right through the centre of the house, which means, of course, that the whole must be demolished. Its death-knell has not actually been sounded yet, but, like Death itself, it is only a matter of time.

The house has witnessed many changes in its existence of nearly two hundred and fifty years. It was built originally about 1690 by Richard Devon, a London merchant who died in 1710, and seems to have had a very tranquil, undisturbed life throughout the greater part of the eighteenth century. It was bought by the Somerset family and used as a dower house of Reigate Priory. Lady Henry Somerset once lived here: so also did Baron Maseres for fifty years until the time of his death in 1824 (presumably the name of the house derives from him, while a more substantial association was his legacy for a sermon to be preached every Sunday in Reigate Church; he also bequeathed a library).

During the War the house was used as G.H.Q., and subsequently was let as apartments: both of which occupations would have seemed to mean its ultimate disruption. But from this fate it was saved by Mr. Alan Ely, its present owner and occupier, who, with a nice discernment, had it brought back to its earlier state, under the architectural direction of Mr. Charles Baker.

It is always difficult, without documentary proof, to trace back and put a date to alterations made to old houses. One has perforce to go on the visual evidence of the structure itself, though one can easily be deceived by this. Apart from the carrying on of a style much later than the date commonly ascribed to it, there are re-buildings and replacements perhaps in an earlier manner, but so carefully done that anyone of a succeeding generation might fairly assume such work to be the original. There



ENTRANCE FRONT



TWO VIEWS OF THE GARDEN FRONT

appears to be no doubt, however, that the exterior of the main block of this house remains much as it originally was, both on the front facing the roadway and on the garden front. The elevations are very characteristic of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Undoubtedly they were designed by an architect, and one well versed in the new style which Inigo Jones incepted and Wren transmuted with English character. But who the architect was is now unknown.

The front entry is marked by a fine door-case in wood painted white, set centrally in relation to a symmetrical arrangement of windows, the frames of which are of that early type showing a wide margin nearly flush with the face of the brickwork.

On the garden side the ground slopes down, and this gave occasion for an attractive and logical feature, in the form of two flights of steps on either side of the garden doorway. The brickwork incorporates some moulded strings, and on the garden side a pleasant variety is given to the elevation by light headers which produce a chequer effect, reminiscent of some of the old brickwork in East Anglia.

The wing at one side is a later addition. Precisely when it was built, one can only conjecture by the look of it, but at least there is in existence a water-colour drawing of 1823 which shows this wing as a two-storey block finished with a flat roof and a balustrade in line with the first floor: so that the top storey and attic must be later than that. Alterations were made to the house in the middle of the nineteenth century, and very possibly this additional storey was then added.

The front entry leads into a panelled hall, with a good oak staircase rising from it. This staircase has triple balusters to each tread, with a robust handrail and a generous sweep around the newel post at the foot.

In Victorian days the hall floor was laid with tiles, and had red and green marbled walls; but these incongruities have been wisely removed, and the hall brought back as much as possible to its original condition. The woodwork has all been pickled, and its tone is very restful. One may question, however, whether this practice of pickling has not been overdone in recent years. There has been a mania for removing paint from old panelling. In the case of oak it seems reasonable enough, but pine panelling was originally intended to be painted. It then presented a uniform



DRAWING - ROOM

Here the panelling is painted parchment tone. The fireplace recess is lined with Dutch tiles

surface. When stripped, it is often seen blemished by a host of knots and other surface defects.

Returning, however, to this house, we pass from the hall into the principal room, the drawing-room, extending from front to back. Here also the walls are panelled, but in this case they are painted parchment tone, and on either side of the fireplace are built-in china cupboards with glazed doors. This room, like all the others in the house, is furnished appropriately with old pieces, including some fine examples of Queen Anne walnut. But there is no sense of the museum about it. It is eminently a lived-in room with a comfortable homely air. Indeed the whole house is characteristically English, a very pleasant relic of former days. The more, therefore, is its impending fate to be deplored. As an example of design and good workmanship the accompanying illustrations serve as a worthy record, and supplementing them are the careful, measured drawings by Mr. Tunstall Small and Christopher Woodbridge in their volume of "Houses of the Wren and Early Georgian Periods." Structurally, the house has long years of life before it. How great a pity that it should be swept away when others remain that we should be glad to see demolished. There is, too, a charming garden enclosed by old brick walls—simple and satisfying in treatment like the house itself.

RANDAL PHILLIPS.



HALL AND STAIRCASE

The detail views show the fine balustrade of oak. All the woodwork has been pickled