

LAST RELIC OF THE PLASTERERS' CRAFT

(An article by Kathleen French in The Western Morning News 1967)

If the planning consultants' report, on Exeter, with its recommendations • for a drama centre and theatre workshops, and one councillor's vision of a new college of art, art gallery and arts centre are fulfilled, Exeter will have a cultural centre which will reflect a golden age of 300 years ago -when men fostered crafts as well as the arts and patronised craftsmen who never dreamed of mass-production.

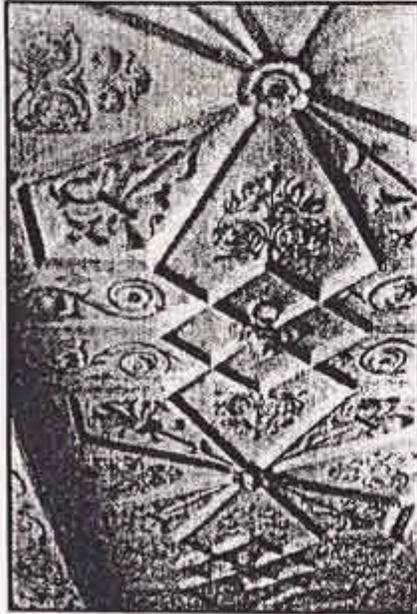
In North Street, bordering the "golden heart." is a shop which has been empty now for six months, but which began its life as a city mansion. It had a sumptuous drawing-room on the first floor, with an intricate plaster ceiling. Later it became of all things, a brewery, and then an antique shop. Before North Street was widened in 1818 - a plaque records the event - it was possible to shake hands across the street from the uppermost windows.

Later still soon after the turn of the present century, the larger part of the plaster ceiling - which would have had to be sacrificed for further road widening - was cut down and transported by horse-drawn wagon to Lewtrenchard. Here the famous squarson, Sabine Baring-Gould, had it re-erected piece by piece in the Long Gallery, where it remains in all its glory - 300 years old and good for many a decade yet.

This ceiling is an example of the interlacing square and kite-shaped panels formed by single-moulded ribs with floral sprays, strapwork and arabesques, which once abounded in the city, but of which no other example now remains. The destruction of plasterwork in Gandy Street and Bedford Circus was a serious loss; we can ill-afford to lose any more.

Sabine Baring-Gould has been accused of having a "magpie mind." Possibly, though, but for his acquisitiveness, this piece of fine craftsmanship would have perished for ever.

Now this house in North Street lies empty, dusty and forlorn, awaiting the long-delayed redevelopment of the centre of a city where elegant sedan chairs have given way to congested motor traffic. One hopes the plasterwork at least will be preserved, a relic of a craft which will probably never be revived.



Mansfields Antique Shop in North Street, Exeter, and the fine 17th century plasterwork ceiling, part of which was removed to Lewtrenchard Manor by the Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould, when the frontage of the Eagle Brewery (as it then was) was rebuilt early in this century.

