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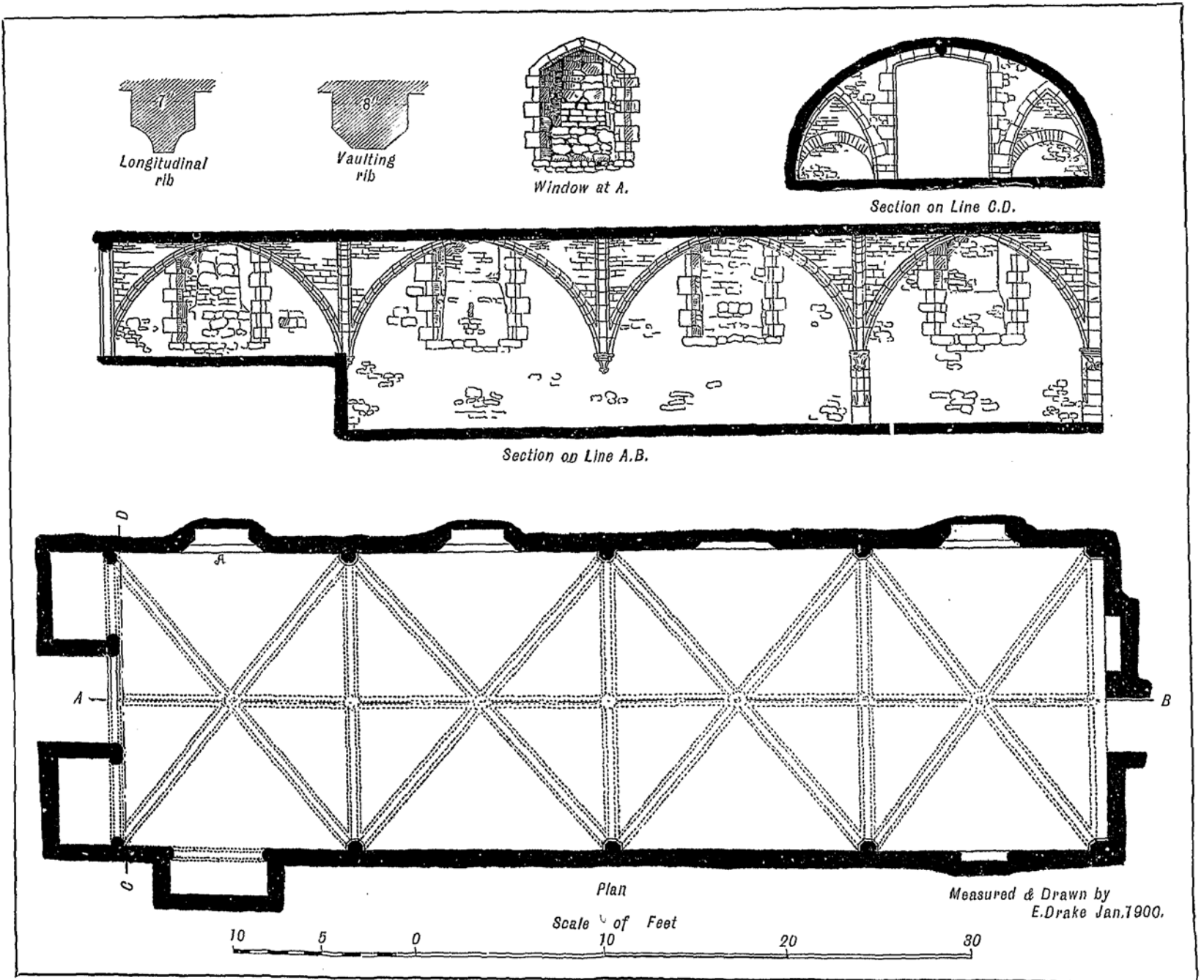
MEDIÆVAL CRYPTS AT ROCHESTER.

BY GEORGE PAYNE, F.L.S., F.S.A.

IN a city possessing so many splendid architectural remains as Rochester it is a source of satisfaction to be enabled to place before the world details of a fine example of domestic architecture, which has existed in the city for six hundred years without receiving that attention it so richly deserves. Many persons know, or have heard, that beneath the "George Inn," in the High Street, there is an interesting cellar, and recently my attention was drawn to it by my friend Mr. Thomas Winch, who accompanied me to the place, which subsequently resulted in my superintending the cleaning of the chamber, and employing Miss Drake to prepare the plans (Plate I.) and drawings which illustrate this Paper; hence we have before us faithful and artistic representations of the lower storey of a house existing in Rochester about A.D. 1300.

That this house was of considerable importance, and erected by a person of opulence, may be judged by the ornate character of what is left of it below ground. Successive houses have been built upon this ancient vaulted crypt, and it yet remains in almost an uninjured state, in spite of its having been used as a skittle-alley and beer-cellar for a lengthened period.

We will now treat of its dimensions and details. The chamber is oblong, 54 feet in length, 16 feet 8½ inches in width, and 11 feet in height, with four quadripartite vaults over, the shell of the vaults being chalk ashlar. There are ribs on the groins, and longitudinal, chamfered, plain, and hollow respectively, with ornamental bosses at the intersections. The nine bosses are from 12 to 15 inches in diameter, each being carved in high relief. Fig. 1 represents oak leaves and acorns; Fig. 2, grapes and vine leaves; Fig. 3, a lizard encircled by a wreath of foliage; Fig. 4, a



PLAN AND SECTIONS OF MEDIÆVAL CRYPT BELOW THE "GEORGE INN," ROCHESTER.

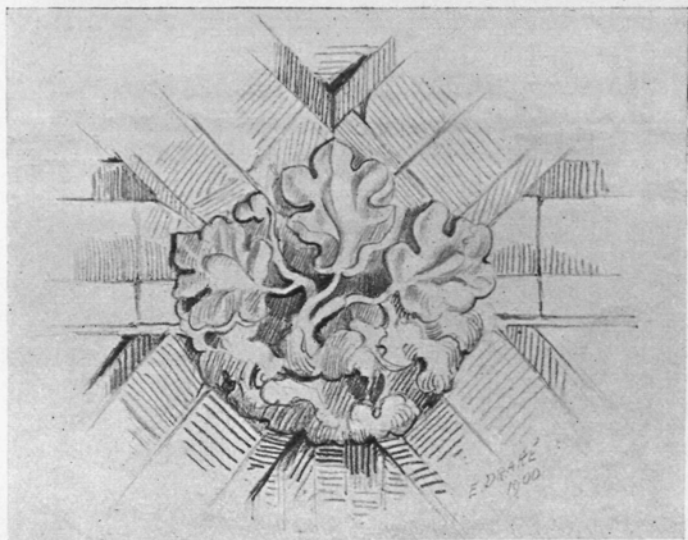


FIG. 1.—CARVED BOSS OF VAULTING.

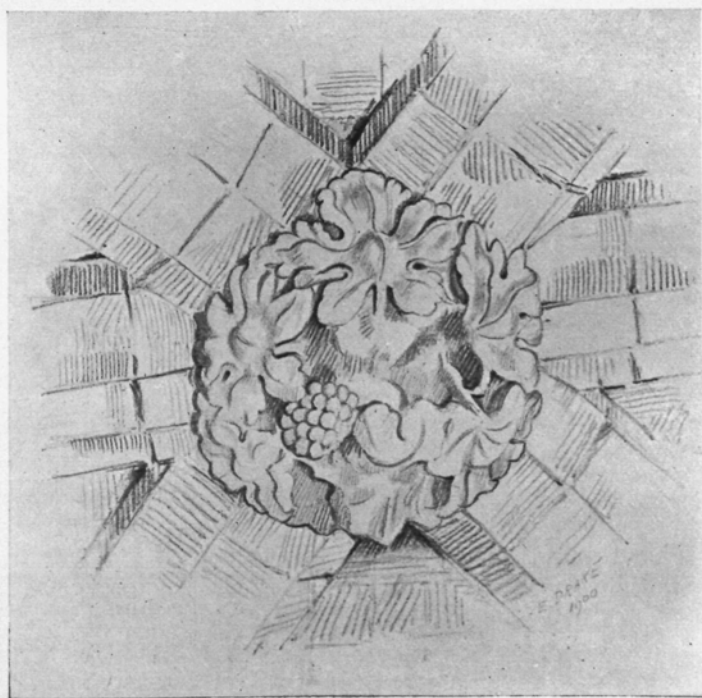


FIG. 2.—CARVED BOSS OF VAULTING.

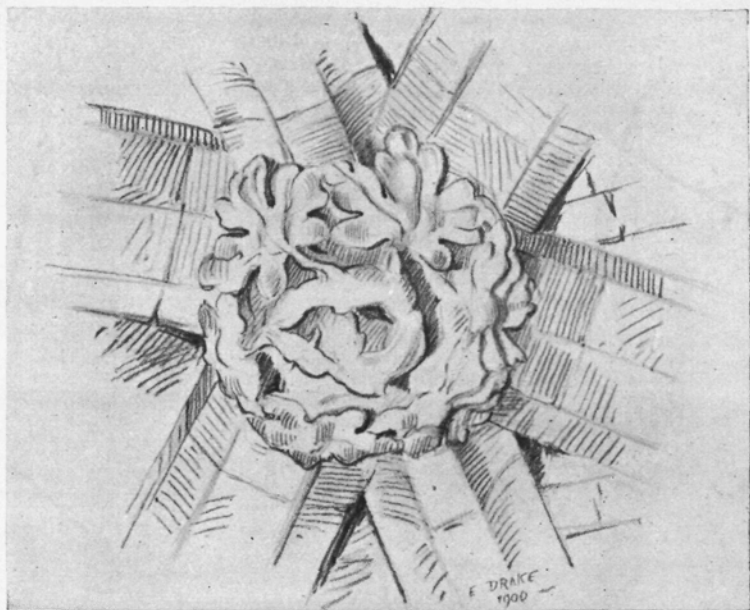


FIG. 3.—CARVED BOSS OF VAULTING.

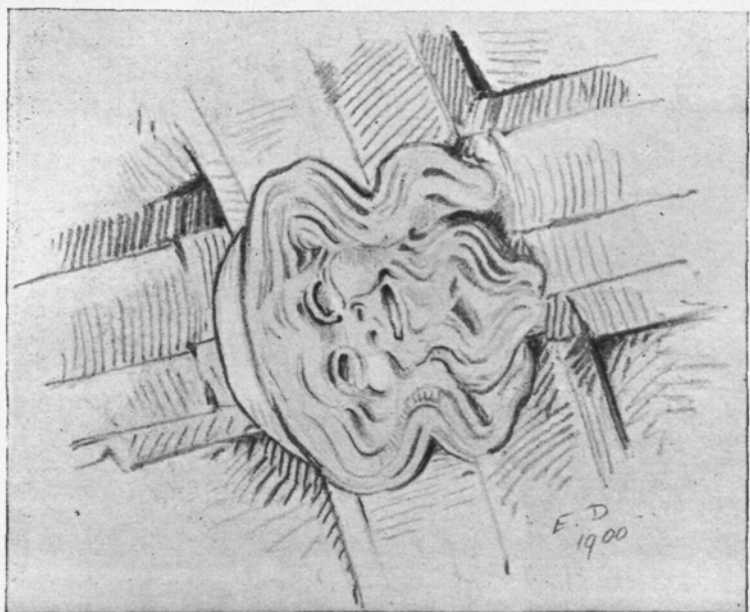


FIG. 4.—CARVED BOSS OF VAULTING.

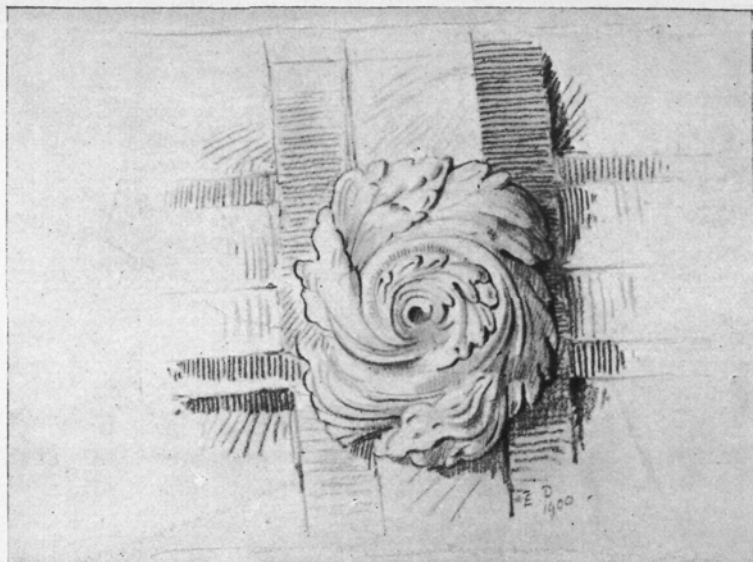
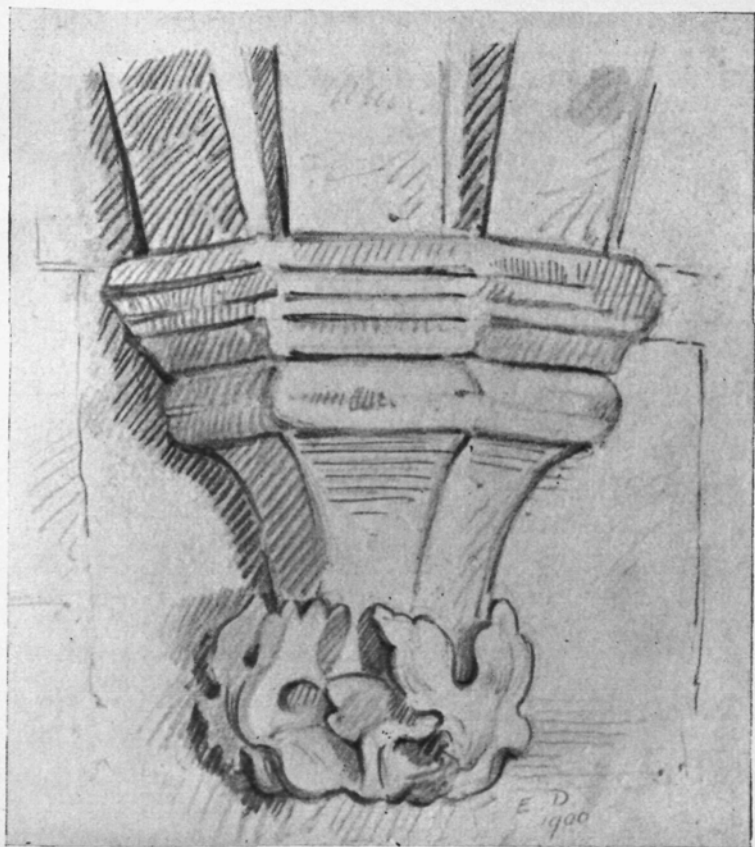
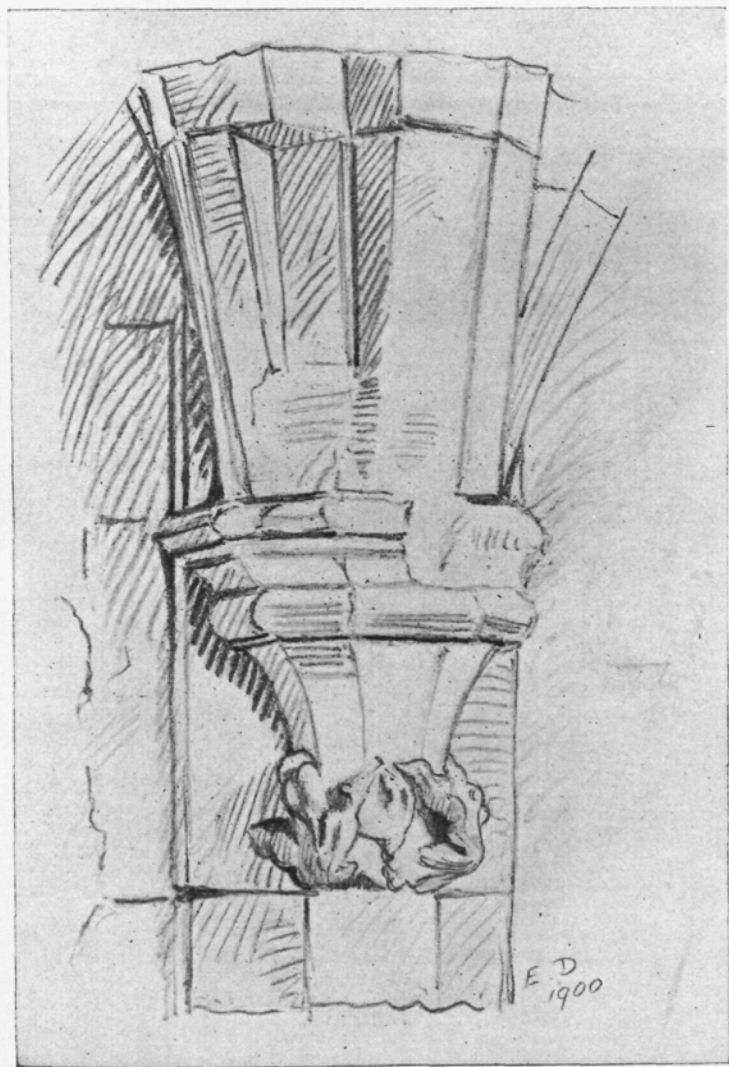


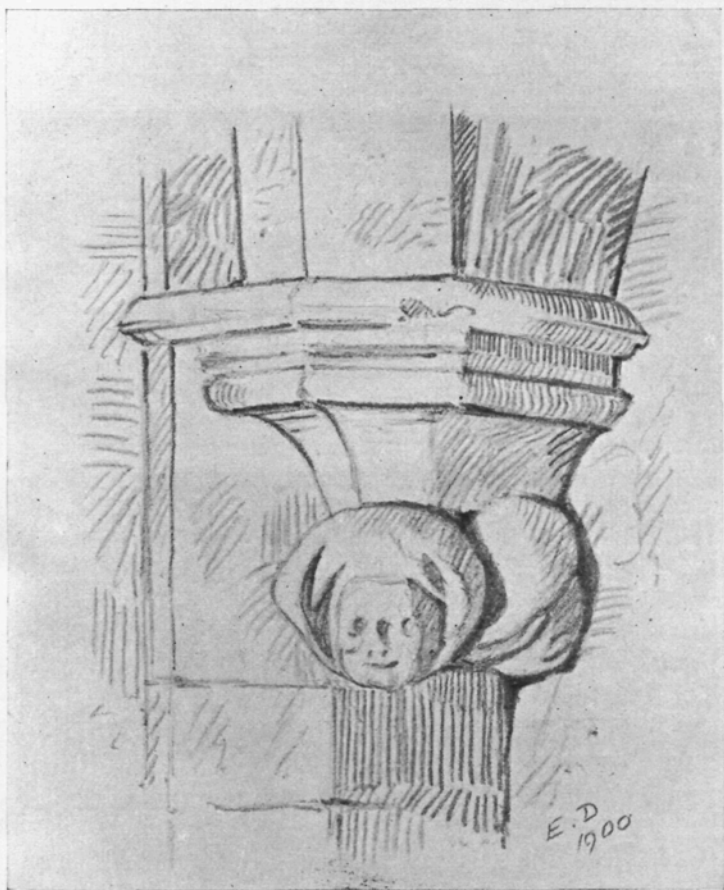
FIG. 5.—CARVED BOSS OF VAULTING.



VAULTING SHAFT AND CORBEL.



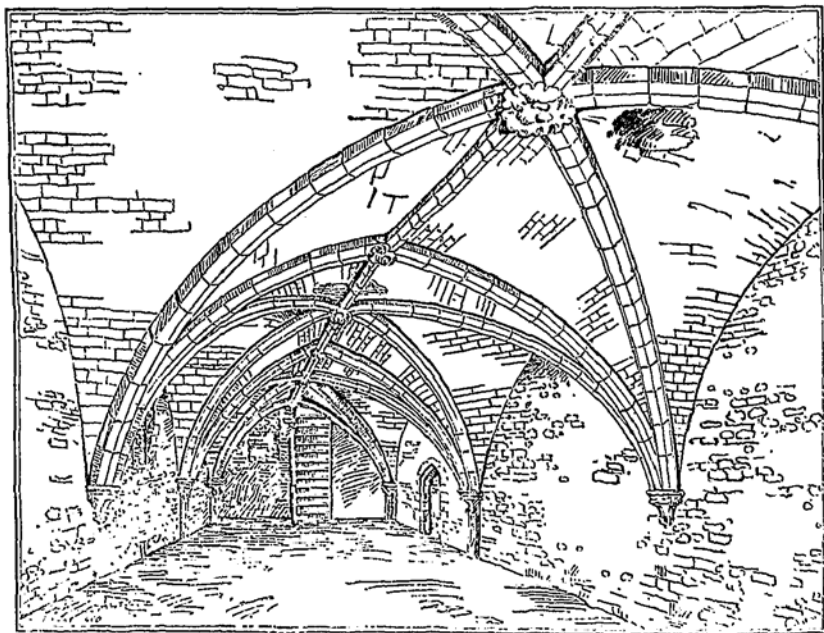
VAULTING SHAFT AND CORBEL.



Vaulting Shaft and Corbel.

grotesque bearded human face; and Fig. 5, a beautiful scroll of acanthus leaves. The four remaining have somewhat suffered from damp, but they appear to be groups of leaves.

The ribs of the vaults spring from corbels, which are variously ornamented, but those in the bay at the northern end rest upon stop-chamfer vaulting shafts which rise from the floor, and are surmounted by corbels. Three of the latter are figured on Plates given; the others are not quite distinguishable. The crypt is divided into four bays, with a splayed window opening 6 feet 1½ inches in height, and 4 feet 8 inches in width, now blocked with brickwork in each bay on the western side. Opposite, in the northern bay, is a doorway 5 feet 6 inches in height and 2 feet 5 inches in width, blocked up, with a mutilated window-space over that was smaller, but similar to those just described.



VIEW OF MEDIEVAL CRYPT BENEATH THE "GEORGE INN" AT ROCHESTER.

The wall at the northern end of the chamber has been cut through in modern times, and wooden steps inserted in the opening, as shewn above, for convenience of ingress from the yard beyond.

In the southern bay, on the eastern side, is a fine doorway 7 feet 8 inches in height and 4 feet 5 inches in width, which was probably the entrance to the crypt, by means of a flight of stone steps, from above. The southern end has a doorway 10 feet 10 inches in height and 4 feet 11 inches in width, and on either side a pointed arch of 4 feet 2 inches opening and 8 feet 4 inches in height. These three abut on the High Street, the apex of the doorway arch being level with the pavement outside. The doorway is now used as the cellar entrance from the street, and has stone steps leading down to it. With the exception of the small doorway in the northern bay, the arches of the windows and doorways are segmental pointed.

It should be mentioned that a brick wall has been built across the first southern bay to the height of the corbels, the bay having been filled up with earth to that height so that the casks might be nearer the beer-engine above; hence the architectural features of the lower portion of this bay are hidden from view. The heights, therefore, of the doorways and arches at this end must be considered as approximate. At the present time we have no means of judging as to the extent of the house of which this crypt formed part, but the existence of doorways on the eastern side of the latter shew that it extended to the adjoining premises, now occupied by Mr. Bemrose's ironmonger's shop. The cellars of this establishment have been match-boarded round; but while we are writing alterations are being carried out there, revealing the stone walls of the superstructure, 3 feet in thickness.

Through the kindness of Mr. Stephen Aveling I am enabled to give an illustration (Plate II.) of a portion of another interesting crypt formerly existing in Rochester, under the "Crown Inn,"* which stood on the south side of High Street, near the bridge. Symon Potyn, the founder of St. Catherine's Hospital in that city, was master of the inn in 1316. Between the years 1860—1870 the famous hostelry, which

* A plan of this crypt is given in the *Gentleman's Magazine Supplement*, 1789, plate i., p. 1185.



MEDIAEVAL CRYPT

FORMERLY EXISTING BENEATH THE ORIGINAL "CROWN INN" AT ROCHESTER.

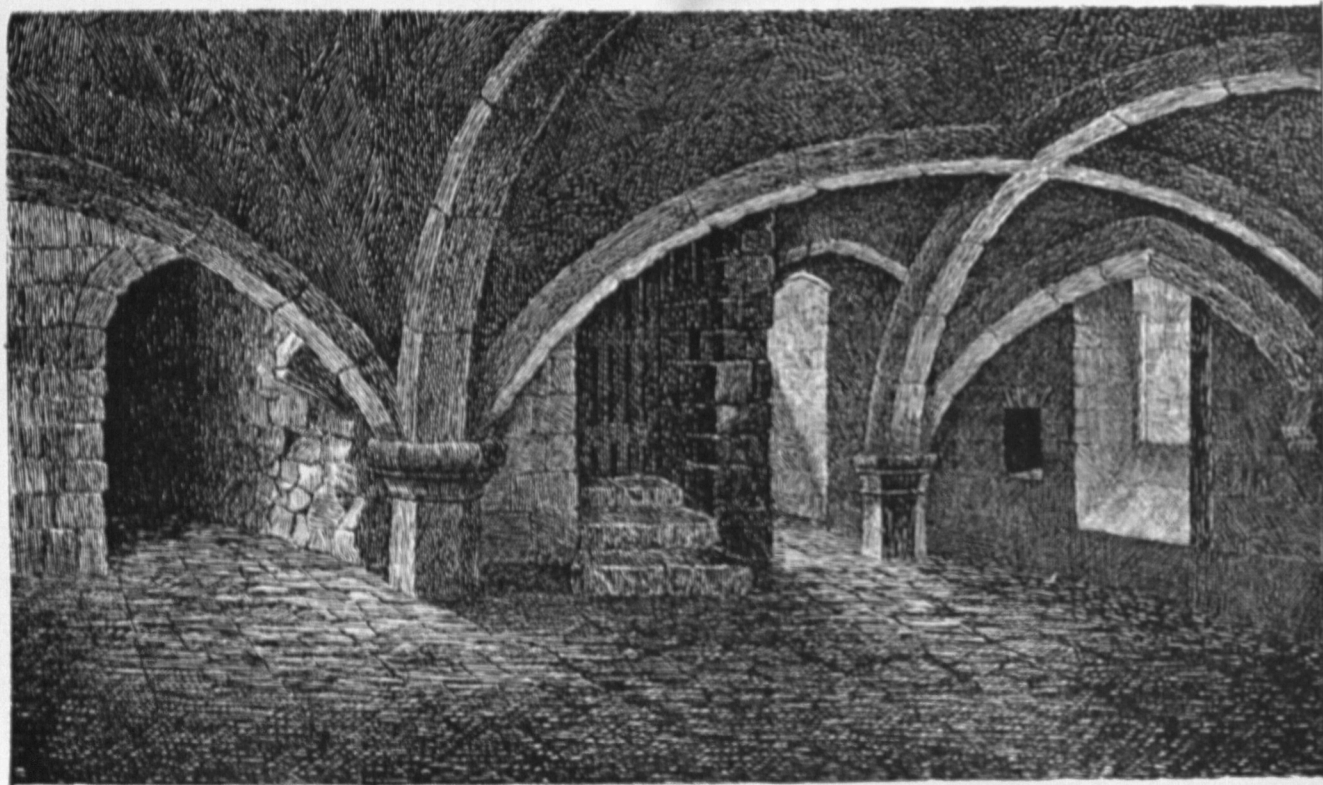
had been the temporary resting-place of many Royal and distinguished personages for centuries, was demolished, but Mr. Aveling fortunately made a drawing of the undercroft a few hours before its final destruction. His sketch was subsequently reproduced in the *Illustrated London News*, but it will be none the less welcome at this distance of time to the members of our Society. Other crypts exist in Rochester to which allusion may be made, namely, that under "The Old Vicarage," which originally formed part of Satis House, the home of Richard Watts, a great benefactor to the city. This undercroft probably extended beyond its present limit, but it now consists only of a single bay, with a quadripartite vault over; the shell is of chalk ashlar, with stone ribs. Another example exists under the "People's Café" in High Street. This consists of a round-headed vault, built entirely of chalk from the foundation. The chamber has been considerably reduced in size by alterations to the fabric above. The walls of the northern portion of the cellar, where a reconstruction has taken place, are remarkable as having been built after the Roman manner, namely, with courses of chalk, bonded at intervals with paving tiles. The east wall to a height of 5 feet is made up thus: chalk (2 courses), tiles (3), chalk (2), tiles (4), chalk (1), tiles (7), with modern brickwork above. Of what date the lower portion of this wall is I am not prepared to say, but it is nevertheless an interesting example.

Beneath the house in St. Margaret's Street (erroneously called "The Old Palace") two bays still remain of its undercroft. They are of plain character, similar to that at "The Old Vicarage."

Vaulted chambers, such as we have been treating of, are usually regarded by the uninitiated as having been connected with ecclesiastical establishments only. It will be helpful to them therefore to give the following extract from Parker's *Domestic Architecture of the Middle Ages*, vol. ii., p. 185:—"Thus we see in London, as in other towns of this period (fourteenth century), the lower storey of the house was usually half under ground, and almost invariably vaulted over, and this when the superstructure was of wood. It was indeed

the most common arrangement to have the lower storey only of stone, and vaulted, and the upper part of wood. These lower apartments served for store-rooms, or warehouses for valuable goods, or for cellars only, according to circumstances." The time must come when these interesting features of domestic architecture will be threatened with destruction; but surely a supreme effort should be made by corporate bodies, or private individuals, to save for posterity the choicest examples, such as we have shewn exist beneath the "George Inn" at Rochester.

Since the above was written another fine example has been brought under my notice by my friend Mr. Richard Cooke (Plate III.). It still exists under Mr. Wallond's fish-shop at the corner of Gabriel's Hill, Maidstone. The engraving here given is from a drawing taken in 1869 by Mr. P. A. Harris.



MEDIAEVAL CRYPT

BENEATH WALLOND'S SHOP, HIGH STREET, MAIDSTONE.