

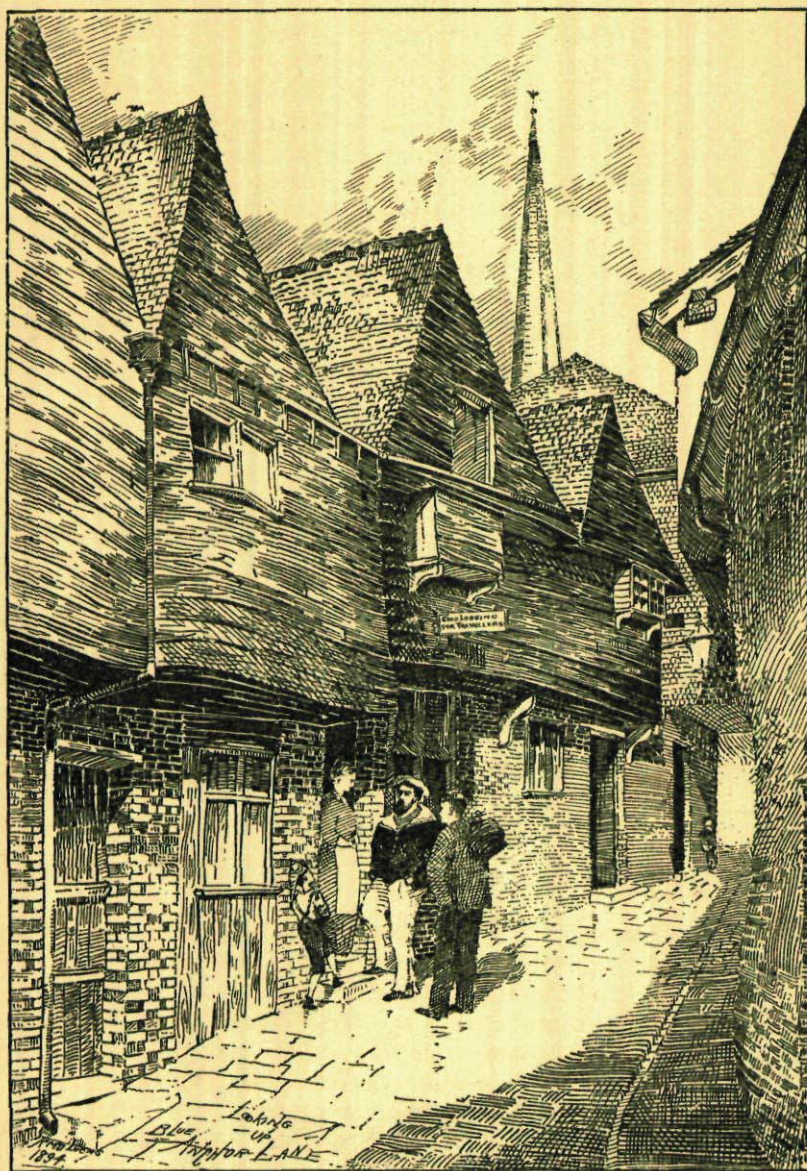
RECENT STREET CHANGES IN SOUTHAMPTON.

BY R. MACDONALD LUCAS, F.R.I.B.A.

It is probable that in most cases the main traffic roads of a country are permanently decided by the early settlers. In going and coming, as in other things, one follows generally the line of least resistance, and wayfarers are very imitative, so that the men whose footsteps formed the first tracks over wild land laid down lines for the feet of many generations of their successors. But the accumulation of dwellings at certain favoured spots introduced other conditions, and streets, as distinct from roads, began to be made. Although as definitions the following are scientifically incomplete, if we, for our present purpose regard a road as a track *connecting*, and a street as a passage *separating*, the habitations of man, a radical difference between them will be at once made clear and emphasized.

"Streets" in many cases were originally formed as roads. A better example of a true road could hardly be found than the High Street of Southampton, which has for centuries formed part of the main track between Winchester and the sea-shore. On the other hand many so-called "Roads" are simply misnamed streets. For an example in Southampton, Polygon Road may be mentioned as answering exactly to our definition of a street. Before its houses were built it was never a track of any importance as a means of getting from one place to another, and even now it has

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BLUE ANCHOR LANE, SOUTHAMPTON, AS IN 1894.

practically no traffic, but serves only as a separation-ground between its north and south terraces. Were the houses of Polygon Road to be destroyed it might become a trackless waste, with but little inconvenience to wayfarers; but if even every building in the High Street were swept away that thoroughfare would still remain a necessary road.

As we study the old maps of Southampton, reproduced and published by the local Record Society, it is very curious to see how occasionally roads have changed their connecting character and become streets, and how more rarely streets, losing their separating character, are becoming roads. Orchard Lane, for instance, is now distinctly a street—indeed, part of it has acquired the new name of "Orchard Place," which suggests residence rather than traffic; and Bargate Street (still called Orchard Street on a map dated 1905) is only waiting for further widening to become a road—and a thoroughfare of no small importance.

A great change is now in progress on the Western Shore. Formerly, within the memory of living man, the waves of the Test River's estuary washed the foot of the wall beyond Arundel Tower and Simnel Street, and until the last decade of the 19th century there was a private garden occupying much of the foreshore between West Gate and the Pier, and thus no public waterside road at all. Several blocks of picturesque but squalid tenements have been cleared away from the area to the north and west of St. Michael's Square, and new buildings erected. The mudland wastes are being gradually reclaimed, and several acres of land have been formed upon the mud of the foreshore. The western aspect of the town, once such a delight to painters, is completely altered, and its most prominent buildings are now the electricity station and the model dwellings.

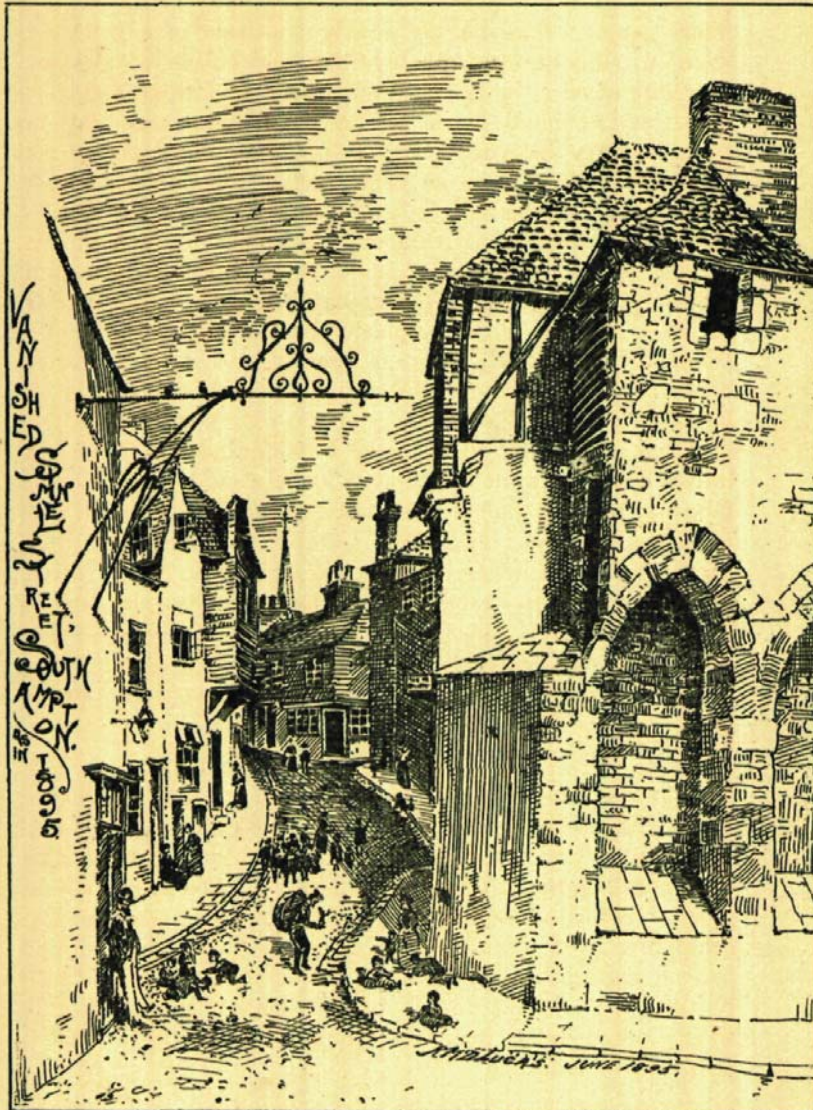
In this clearance Blue Anchor Lane and Simnel Street have been almost destroyed, and though the two properties known as the Houses of King John and Henry VIII. remain on the south side of the lane, it is so much altered that two views of it, as it was a dozen years ago, will be strange to

many people. The houses mostly consisted of a brick or stone ground-storey, with overhanging rooms of timber-framing, covered with weather-board or lath-and-plaster. The trend of small house building is (where permitted) in some respects towards a return to methods more akin to this apparently flimsy form of construction, for within the last ten years or so people have begun to recognise that the walls of small houses are for shelter from wet and cold rather than for support of weight—a function better left to piers and pillars; and it is a curious fact that frail laths, not a quarter of an inch thick, with the plaster protecting them and the timber carrying them, have frequently withstood centuries of weather without the slightest sign of decay, while in brick buildings timber sometimes begins to rot almost before the building is finished. The cause of the durability of the old lath-and-plaster work is probably to be found partly in the fact that the best timber trees were the first to be felled, and that slow transport gave them suitable time and conditions for seasoning, but mainly in the wonderful preservative properties of the lime-plaster. In these wooden upper-storeys there often appear small box-like excrescences—there are two in the sketch of Blue Anchor Lane (looking up)—quaint little oriel windows of a type justly revived in “week-end” cottage designs.

Simnel Street always had an evil look, and though it has been almost entirely rebuilt, something of the same character clings about it still. Perhaps it is the gloomy height of the “dwellings” on one side and the insignificance of the “models” on the other; but it has not a wholesome aspect. The preservation of the Undercroft has been secured by rebuilding over it and forming an area on the south side, thus giving light and ventilation to the windows and access to the old doorway; and those who knew it as a dark and musty potato-cellar may more conveniently revisit it under its present conditions.

As the years pass we shall no doubt see many street changes in the old town. Of such changes the benefit is not to be always looked for by those who design them or even for those who carry them out, but one thing seems

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SIMNEL STREET, SOUTHAMPTON, AS IN 1895.

quite certain, namely, that unless the ideas and forethought of one generation are recorded and considered by the next, such changes will be haphazard, and again and again the finest opportunities will be missed.

A street alteration was carried out in 1905 at the west side of the Bargate, where a public-house known as the "Coach-maker's Arms," began to tumble down, and was eventually removed to make way for additional Guildhall offices for the magistrates, barristers, and police. The new building has been planned to allow for a side road and footpath to relieve the traffic of the centre central archway; and when the alteration at this corner is completed the passage that was cut through the base of the half-round tower in the 18th century can be filled up, so as to let the tower stand again solidly on the ground. In the new buildings (which, when not in use, may be visited by permission of the Chief Constable) there are two very fine carved oak chimney-pieces which, by a string of lucky coincidences, it was possible to remove thither for their permanent preservation from No. 50, High Street, where they had been discovered. It so happened that while employed on the Guildhall work I was also superintending alterations at No. 50 for the leaseholder of the property, which belongs to the Corporation. The leaseholder had sub-let, and the sub-tenant wanted the chimney-pieces removed. Finally a bargain, of which I do not think anyone will complain, was arranged, mainly through the instrumentality of our Assistant-Engineer (Mr. W. H. Killick), the Corporation giving their leaseholder fifty pounds for the two chimney-pieces, for *one* of which £800 has since been offered!

These chimney-pieces, with some panelling that accompanied them, were fitted into the new building, where they now adorn the magistrates' and barristers' rooms. They are of oak, very elaborately carved and enriched with figures and with inlaid work in various woods, and appear to date from the early part of the 17th century, the workmanship being evidently foreign, probably Spanish or Italian. The figures are holdly, but not coarsely cut, and the enrichments and mouldings are most delicately executed. An incised motto

on one of the panels, which has been placed over the door of the magistrates' room, is full of suggestion. "REPENTANCE DESERVET PARDON" it reads. The omission of the final H in "deserveth" may be noted as an indication that the motto was carved by a foreign hand, and the general excellence of the work shows that it was a skilled hand used to the Latin characters; perhaps the hand of a prisoner detained long in the town and allowed to work at his trade of a wood-carver. Possibly he may have remained here to found one of the many Southampton families whose names show a foreign origin, and his unrecognised descendants may be to-day admiring his handiwork and reflecting on the strange workings of chance and change which make the motto carved in a dwelling-house 300 years ago no less appropriate where it is to-day.
