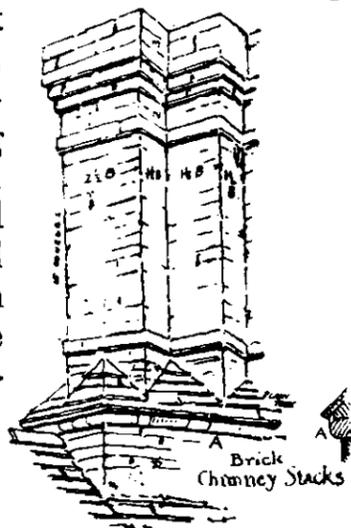


The Saunders Almshouses at Flamstead, and the Pemberton
Almshouses at St. Albans.

BY MR. S. FLINT CLARKSON, F.R.I.B.A.

The four almshouses on the north side of the village street, are little one-storied brick buildings—with very small doors, little windows, and simply picturesque chimney-stacks breaking the ridge line of the plain-tiled roof. All the brickwork is carried out in thin bricks—five bricks and five joints rising only a foot in height. The inscription on the front, after expanding the abbreviations, is:—

Sumus immortale sepulchrum
Thomæ Saunders
de Beechwood
An^o. Dniⁱ.
1669.

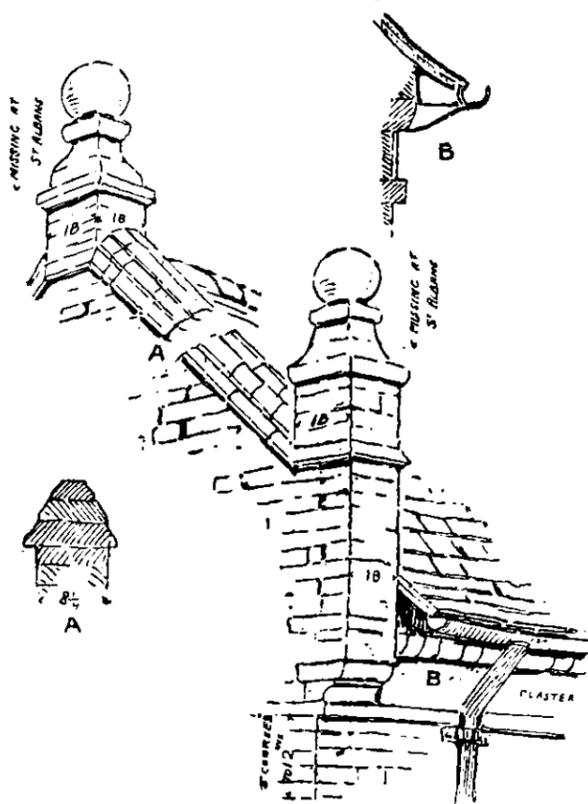


AT THE SAUNDERS
ALMSHOUSES,
FLAMSTEAD.

The almshouses were, therefore, apparently intended as an ever-during memorial of Thomas Saunders, who died in 1664,—the father of the Thomas Saunders, who died in 1693, and was commemorated, with his family, at the east end of the south aisle of Flamstead Church.

The buildings are noteworthy, on account of the numerous points of resemblance to the Pemberton Almshouses at St. Albans, situated on the west side of Bowgate, opposite St. Peter's Churchyard. The general form, the doors, windows, eaves-courses and chimney-stacks are similar; and on the gables at Flamstead, in perfect condition—are moulded brick finials with balls

on their tops;—which seem to show very clearly how the charming gateway of the Pemberton Almshouses



GABLE AT THE SAUNDERS ALMSHOUSES,
FLAMSTEAD.

was finished at first. When the balls and the parts below them, in the Pemberton gateway, fell to pieces,—somebody put up a kind of iron arrow in the place of the central ball and three moulded courses:—two courses only of the old finials are missing below the balls in the finials at the sides of the gable. The arrow was probably in existence before 1808. Brayley (“*Beauties of England and Wales, 1808*,”) does not expressly state that it

was, but the wording and the probabilities make one inclined to believe it. The arrow was either the origin or perpetuation of the tradition,—current now-a-days,—with reference to the founder’s accidentally killing a widow with an arrow. Has anyone hunted down the first appearance of this statement?—and of that which usually follows—as in Brayley for instance—that Roger Pemberton “built the almshouses by way of atonement?”

There are other points of resemblance,—due either to accident or design,—between the almshouses at Flamstead and St. Albans. The sites stand in about the same relation to the churches, and similar annual sums are provided for the almspeople. Roger Pemberton put a rent charge of £30 a year on lands at Wootton near Bedford,—that is £5 a year for each of the six residents at St. Albans. A rent charge of £20 a year from Gately Grounds at Flamstead provides £5 a year for each of the four residents at Flamstead. The close resemblance of general design and detail, and the difference in date of erection, is a mystery as yet.

Diligent enquirers might perhaps prove that the dates were really nearer than 1669 and 1627. Records of deaths of almspeople would be fair evidence.

Roger Pemberton first settled at St. Albans after 1615, was Sheriff of the County, and died in 1627. He was grandfather of Sir Francis Pemberton, one of the Worthies of Herts, who was born at St. Albans in 1625, was Lord Chief Justice of both Benches successively, and died in 1697. Roger Pemberton made his will, 30th November, 1624, and added the important codicil bearing on the "exhibitions" to the almspeople, (and other matters),—apparently when he was seriously ill,—7th November, 1627. He died 13th November, 1627, aged 72. The inscription over the gateway of the almshouses records his burial in St. Peter's Church, 20th November, 1627. The will was proved shortly afterwards; but did his family spend a good number of years in arranging for the carrying out of this part of it? The Flamstead almshouses are, as we have seen, dated only five years after the death of Thomas Saunders.