

THEN AND THERE SERIES

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Elizabethan Citizen



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GENERAL EDITOR

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Elizabethan Citizen

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Illustrated from contemporary sources by

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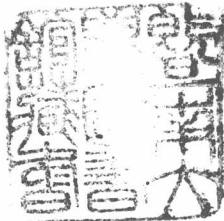
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TO THE READER

If you live in a town, do you know how old it is? Does it go back as far as Queen Elizabeth I? If so, walk round it one day just trying to picture to yourself what it was like then. Make a list of the contrasts between Then and Now. It will probably be a long one.

First of all, in most cases, you will find your town is much bigger today. If it once had walls round it, you may be able to discover where they ran and where the gates stood. You will be astonished to find how small a part of the present town is inside the line of the walls. If you live in London, of course, the contrast between the Elizabethan town and London today is even greater. Only the tiny centre we now call the City of London was inside the walls, although in the days of Elizabeth I Londoners were already building outside the walls. You can see this on the plan on p. 56.

There were many fewer people in England then than now. The population in England and Wales in the time of Elizabeth I was probably about 3,250,000. Can you find out the latest figure for the population today? Here are some of the figures for town populations in Elizabethan times:

London, about 60,000; Norwich, about 12,000; Bristol, about 10,000; Newcastle, about 10,000; Exeter, about 8,000; York, about 7,500; Coventry, about 6,600.

Can you find out how big these towns are today?

Some of our biggest cities today were hardly more than villages then because the great industries which have since



made them grow did not exist. There was no great cotton or steel industry, nor were there the enormous electrical, engineering and motor works of today. The above map shows you the thirty largest towns in England in the reign of Elizabeth I.

Compare it with a modern map and find out which of our great cities today were then too small to appear on it.

The second thing which might strike you would be difference in colour. Not so much that there would be more colour then, but in different places: by day, the streets full of gay clothes, scarlets, blues, purples, vermilions, yellows, yes, even on the men; by night, deep gloom, with only a few feeble lights. Today, on the other hand, you would be very surprised to see a man in a bright yellow or crimson suit and many people you meet will be wearing browns, blacks, greys or fawns. Yet at night-time our towns glow with electric lights and signs of all colours, so that an Elizabethan, wandering along the streets, would think he was in fairyland.

Thirdly, sounds. Today: grinding gears of buses, the roar of motor-bikes, car horns, factory hooters, railway whistles, chugging engines and road-drills. Then: clattering horses' hooves on cobbled streets, the slow rumble of carts, the mooing and baaing of cows and sheep driven to market, street cries of pedlars selling their goods, dogs barking at beggars.

Lastly, smells. Here I think you would certainly say that you were more fortunate today. For unless you happen to live close to a tannery or some other smelly business, you will not find much to annoy your nose. On the whole, our streets are wide, our drains are good and we have strict rules about carting away rubbish. Walking down an Elizabethan street you would probably have wanted to hold your nose all the time. Pigstyes, stables and cow-sheds were all mixed up with the houses. Into the narrow streets with overhanging houses, people seemed to throw everything: dirty water, old cabbage leaves, bones, dead cats and a lot more. The drains were often very smelly, too.



Elizabethan houses

Town Councils were always making rules about keeping the streets cleaner, but they were not very successful.

Gay clothes and bad smells: perhaps these would have been the things which you liked best and worst in an Elizabethan town.

PART ONE

The Elizabethan Citizen in a Country Town

THE CITIZEN AT HOME

In Lincoln everyone knew Simon Fulbeck. He was a *cordwainer*.¹ This curious word comes from Cordova, a town in Spain famous for making fine leather. By Simon's time a cordwainer had come to mean someone who made good shoes. Ladies liked the fine leather which Simon used and so his business prospered. At first he was content to live in the same house as his father and grandfather, built of *wattle and daub*, with no chimney, and windows filled with criss-cross lattice-work. But when he grew richer, he began to grumble about the dark, small, draughty rooms. So he decided to build a new house, roomier, lighter, with all the latest comforts.

It was built on a frame of stout oak timbers with brick-work between. The roof was tiled and there were actually chimneys and glass windows—two luxuries to the Elizabethan such as television and a refrigerator are to us. The house probably looked like the picture on the opposite page.

The large kitchen was a great triumph: it had a huge brick oven, and a cistern of lead with a large brass tap which gave running water. In the old house they had to wind the bucket down the well, so now it seemed a miracle to turn the tap and see it gush forth. The 'miracle' came about because the Town Council had lately built water-pipes or *conduits* to carry good water through the streets and Simon Fulbeck was able to connect up his own pipes with

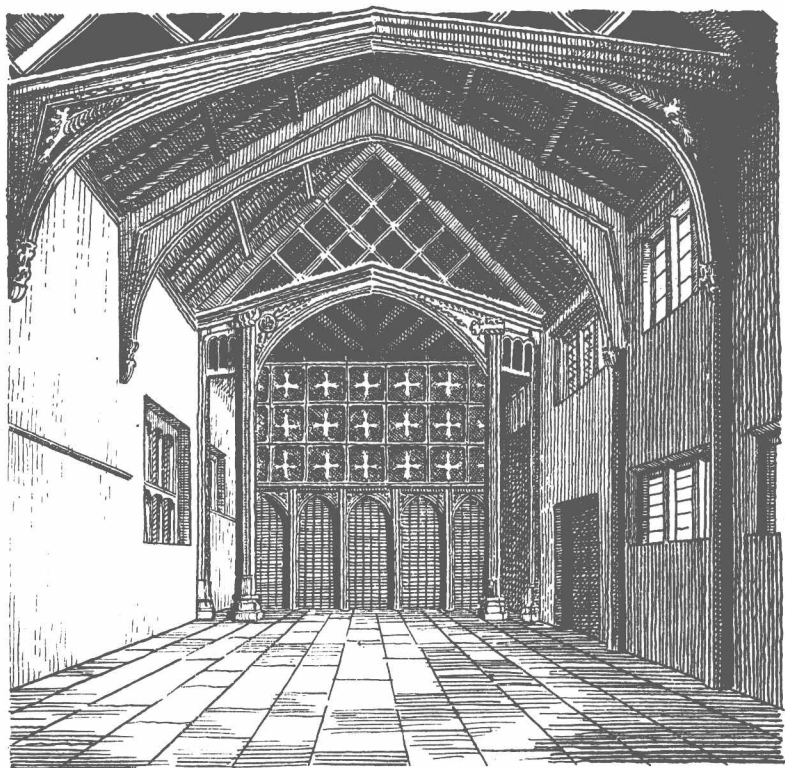
¹ You will find the meanings of words printed like *this* in the Glossary on page 90.



these. Katharine, his wife, was forever showing her *gossips* her beautiful new kitchen.

The chief room in the house was the hall. There were two parlours and upstairs four rooms on each of the two floors. The ceilings no longer had heavy wooden rafters but were done with smooth white plaster, worked into graceful patterns. The windows had real glass: in the best rooms Simon had clear glass from Normandy

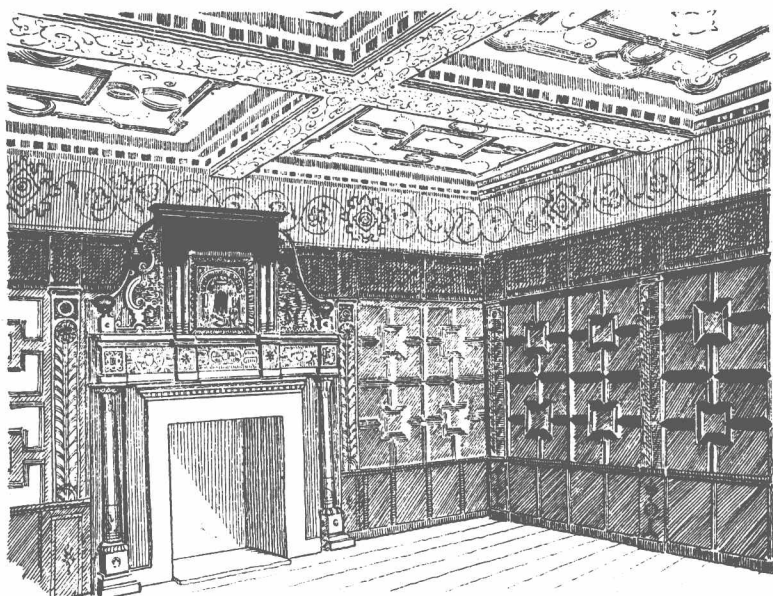




The hall

which was expensive, but in the rest he put cheaper English glass which did not let in so much light. Still, the new house seemed astonishingly light and bright compared with the old one.

Simon and Katharine got much pleasure from choosing decorations for the house. Wallpapers were very new indeed and they only ventured on one. The rest of the rooms were either panelled in wood or hung with cloth or painted with patterns. For the hangings a painter was brought in who said he could paint either animals and birds, or flowers, or a

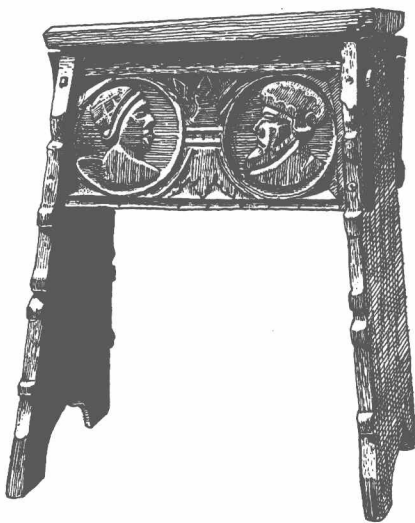
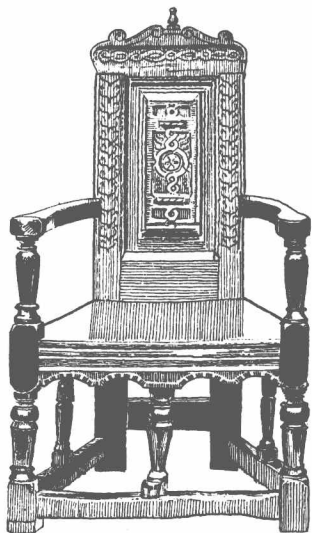


A parlour

story. When the designs had been chosen, they were copied either in weaving (tapestry), or embroidery (*arras*), or just painted straight on the cloth. Some rooms had patterns painted straight on to the walls like this:



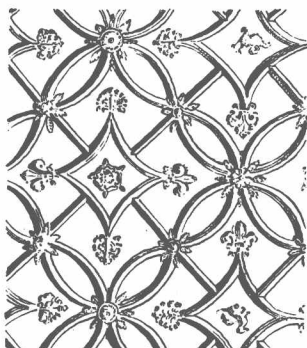
Then they came to the furniture. There were no upholstered chairs or sofas in those days—nothing but benches and hard chairs and stools like this:



Cushions made them more comfortable, so Simon bought three of sheepskin and three embroidered ones. Katharine chose the window curtains of carnation-coloured taffeta.

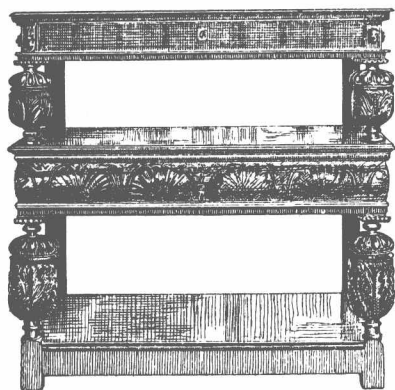
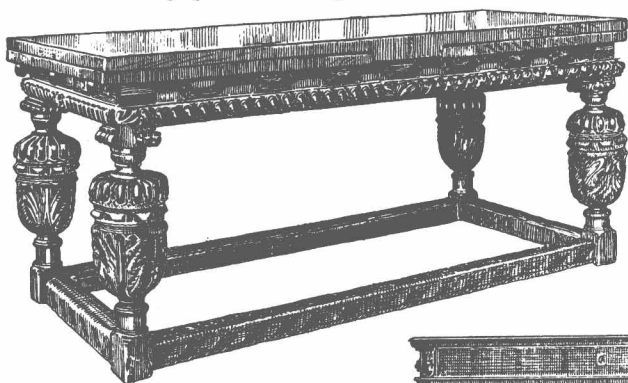


Cushion pattern



Ceiling pattern

Then they bought a fine Turkey carpet for the parlour table, not floor, as you might think. They thought these carpets were much too fine to walk on. Here is the table on which they put the carpet and the sideboard with it:



Now that Simon was getting richer, his plate cupboard was important. Inside it he had at first 6 silver plates, 12 small silver dishes, 12 silver saucers, 2 silver bowls, 2 silver salts, 12 silver spoons and a silver-gilt pepper-box. He wanted to have much grander silver. On the next page are some of the pieces he bought later.

But Simon also brought from his old house the brass and copper kettles, copper and *latten* candlesticks, *pewter* dishes and plates, stone pots and wooden *platters* which had been used for so long in his family. The pewter still did for common use and the servants and apprentices ate off the wooden platters.

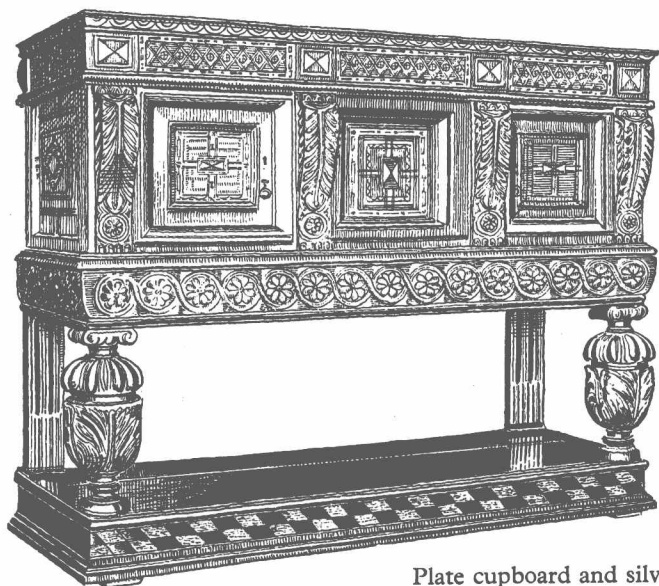
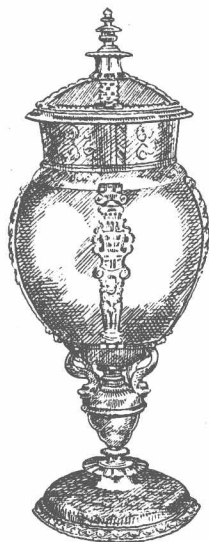
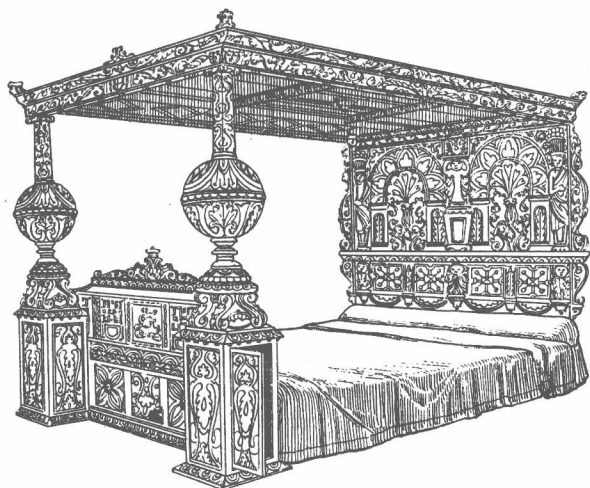


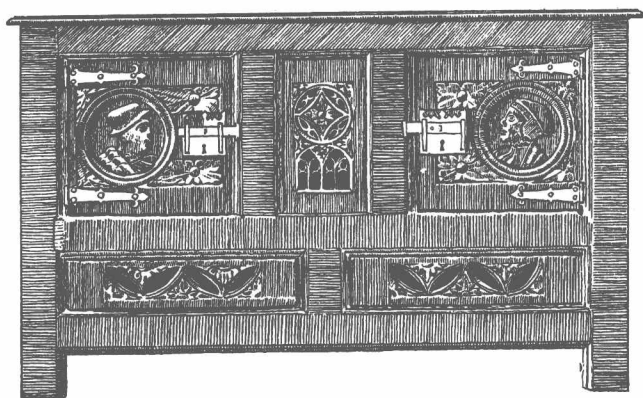
Plate cupboard and silver



The best bedroom had a large bed with a *tester* and curtains of green satin :



There were also a large chest, a long, low *coffer* with two lids, a cupboard called a *hutch* and a chair and stool. This bedroom had a handsome fireplace, with a pair of bellows, a shovel and a pair of tongs beside it. The other bedrooms



Chest

were not so grand in their furniture but they all had the big beds with curtains. Three of them had fireplaces.

If you went to visit the Fulbecks in their new house you would surely be shown some special treasures. First there was Simon's clock: this was very up-to-date, for most people still had to rely on a sundial or the church bell to tell the time. Katharine was very proud of her new looking-glass and an ivory comb in place of her old one, made of *horn* and boxwood. She would also show you her linen chest, full of sheets, tablecloths, napkins and towels. In all the important rooms they had fine candlesticks with white wax candles, for the old, smelly *tallow* candles had been banished to the kitchen. On the first floor Simon had a little study and here on the table he would show you a magnificent silver inkstand, with *quill pens*, sand (which he used instead of blotting-paper), wax for sealing his letters, and also a silver tooth-pick and an ear-pick!

Here is Simon dressed as a comfortable merchant should be.



As important as his clothes to Simon were the cut of his hair and beard. He visited his barber, Thomas Cowertney, quite often and they used to discuss different hair-cuts. Thomas, of course, hated the new fashion of 'beardless men', but would describe most enthusiastically just what he would do with different-shaped faces: if you had a large face like a plate, he advised a long, slender beard; if weasel-faced, much hair should be left to make you look 'like a boiled hen or so green as a goose'; to someone else he would