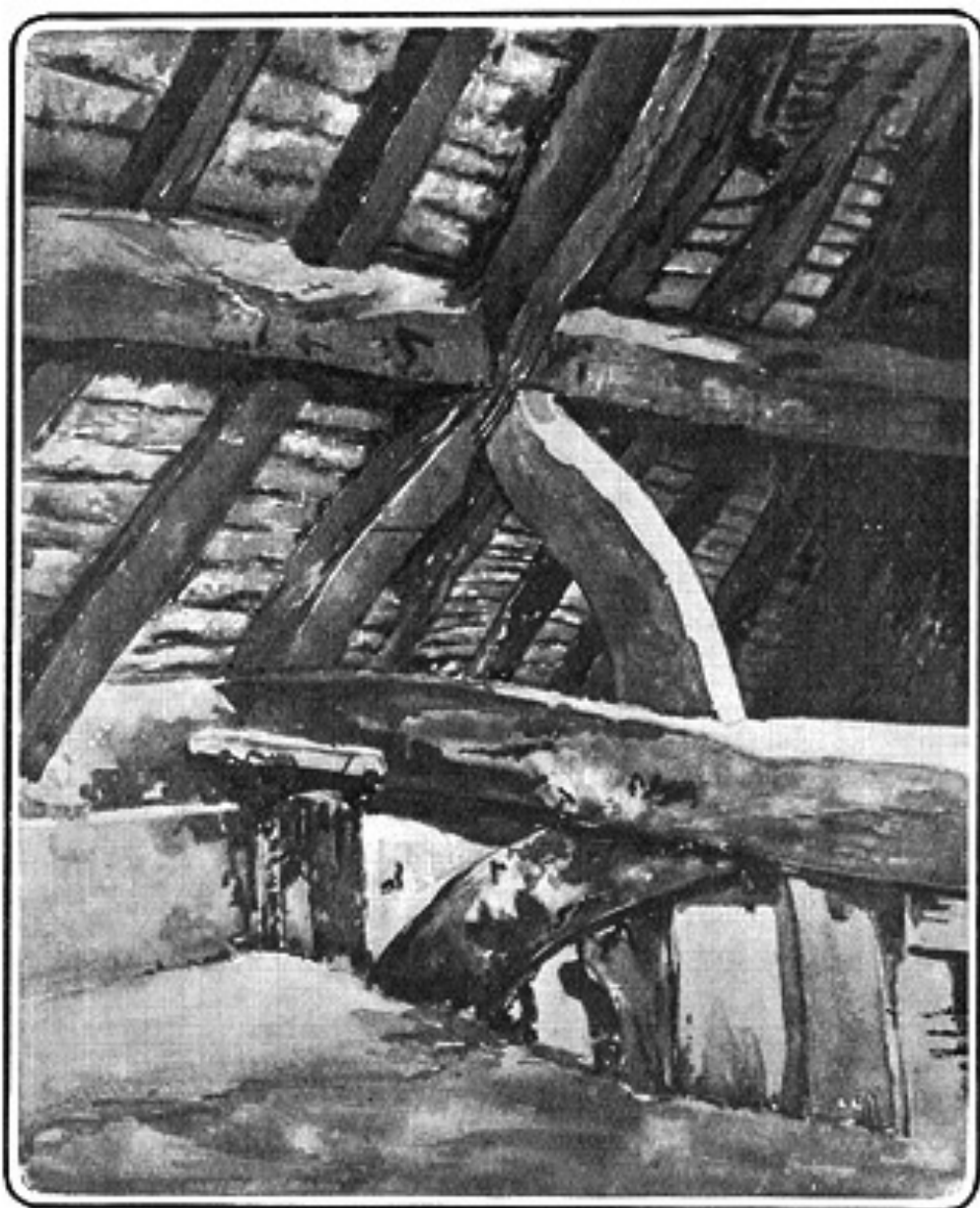


THE TATLER

**THE THREATENED VANDALISM
AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON**

A Letter from Marie Corelli.



THE INTERIOR OF ROOF OF A COTTAGE
Showing beams that existed long before Shakspeare's day

*Faithfully yours
Marie Corelli*

THE THREATENED VANDALISM AT STRATFORD-ON-AVON

A Letter from Marie Corelli.

It may possibly surprise the general public to learn that the preservation of the old cottages of Shakspeare's time in Henley Street, Stratford-on-Avon, is by no means assured. On October 5—the date on which this issue of THE TATLER appears—the trustees of Shakspeare's birthplace are to meet and decide by a voting majority as to whether these buildings, the last genuine remains of the birthplace side of Henley Street, are to be left standing and sacredly maintained, or else razed to the ground. As, but for me and my interference in this matter, the houses, together with "Birch's crock shop" (now incorporated into the hideous Carnegie library and forming its only artistic section), would have been utterly demolished two years ago, I feel that it is my duty perhaps to say a few words more on a subject with which I have been so closely connected and for which I venture to think I have endured more than most people would be willing to do on the ground of national sentiment.

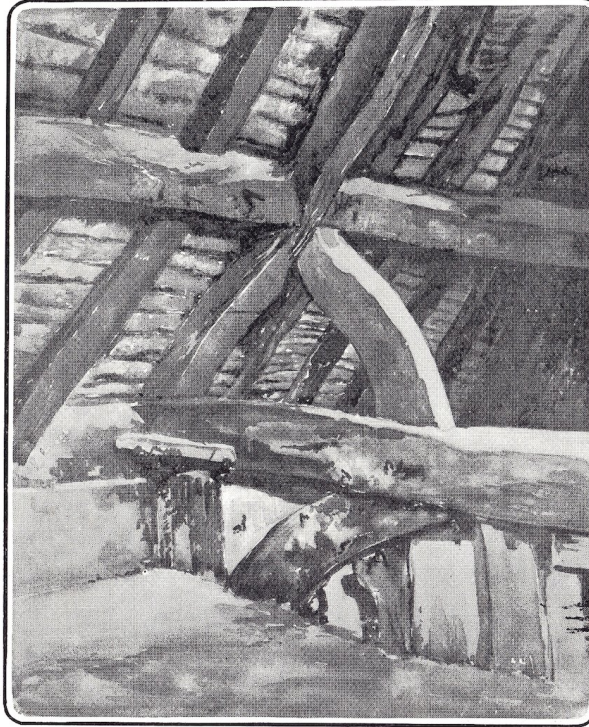
It should therefore be distinctly understood that if the trustees decide to destroy these old Shakspearean relics it will be a decision carried by "local" influence merely and out of a paltry animus and spite against myself. Mr. Sidney Lee, chairman of the executive committee, is anxious that the cottages should be preserved and used for purposes connected with the Birthplace Trust. The money for their proper repair, if refused by the trustees, is guaranteed to him by a few of the "outside" lovers of Shakspeare. Mr. Lionel Cust, of the National Portrait Gallery, is on the side of Mr. Lee, and both these gentlemen are aware that the King is strongly in favour of the preservation of the houses, his Majesty having taken keen interest in the affair ever since last year about this time, when I had the honour of submitting my pamphlet, *The Plain Truth of the Stratford-on-Avon Controversy*, to him together with all other details. Pictures of the grand old timbered roofs of the houses similar to the one reproduced have likewise been submitted to the King.

There is no longer any question of the "authenticity" or "genuineness" of the buildings. Even Mr. Sidney Colvin, British Museum expert though he is, has had to own himself in the wrong since he pronounced them "early Victorian" without examining them. He has not, of course, owned himself in the wrong to me personally; naturally he could not and would not acknowledge a woman's perception as superior to his own. But perhaps the very strangest point of all in the change of front among the more leading trustees is that of Mr. Archibald Flower, who now professes himself anxious—nay, even desirous—to save the old cottages "as it was his father's wish." He therefore, after sparing no pains to disparage me on account of these same cottages as well as to injure himself in that unworthy attempt, now ranks himself on my side.

For this is all I have wanted throughout the whole struggle—merely to save what there is no doubt Shakspeare once saw, and may have possibly even lived in or stayed in. With Sidney Lee, Lionel Cust, and the former arch-opposer, Mr. Flower, now wishing to save the cottages, one would think they would be saved then surely? Not at all. There are wheels within wheels at Stratford-on-Avon, dear general public! For though Mr. Flower is apparently on the scholarly and national side of saving what can never be replaced, which as a trustee he should be, his relatives, oddly enough, are not with him. It is an open secret that his aunt, Mrs. Charles Flower (widow of the Charles Flower who built the ugly Memorial Theatre and edited a "Bowdlerised" edition of the immortal plays), wishes the cottages "razed to the ground."

Her influence no doubt weighs considerably with a certain local chururgeon. Dr. Nason, medical adviser to the Flower family who has been busy securing the "local" votes to oppose and outweigh Mr. Sidney Lee. With Dr. Nason will probably go the vicar (the Rev. George Arbutnot), the newly-elected trustee, the Rev. F. Hodgson, and all the "local operandi," such as Mr. Colbourne of the "Red Horse Hotel, Lunn, the town clerk, and others who have all been named in recent issues of *Truth* and other journals. What I particularly wish to emphasise is that *there now exists no sort of pretext* for pulling down the old houses.

The Carnegie library is built, so the land is not wanted. In fact, to pull them down would be to leave an ugly bare space with a hideous outlook on the back yards of houses in the neighbouring street. Not only that (and this is worth special notice), a risk would be run of injuring the custodian's cottage, which is built against them and which is protected by Act of Parliament. But none of these considerations will weigh against the forces of spite and jealousy, and there is a ludicrous and totally unfounded impression in the minds of the worthy chururgeon, Dr. Nason, and his supporters that to pull the cottages down will somehow give me personal vexation. "Never mind Shakspeare," they say, "let us try to hurt the woman who dared to defend the few remains of his former native street! We've done our very best to hurt her already, and she's not any the



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worse for it. Let's have another go!"

Now, I should just like to say publicly once and for all that if the "local" trustees outvote Mr. Sidney Lee and resolve to destroy any portion of relics which make their town valuable it will not spite me in the least. On the contrary, it will give me the greatest triumph I could have. It will prove that all I have written and said concerning the pettiness of the people (who, as Shakspeare's townsmen, should be above such reproach) is true. It will show that while literature and art, as represented by Mr. Sidney Lee and Mr. Lionel Cust, are on my side, ignorance and obstinacy are against me, as I pray they always will be. I shall regret the demolition of the houses for England's sake and for the sake of all the generations to come who will make pilgrimages to Stratford-on-Avon to see relics no longer there because destroyed by the vandals of 1904; but for myself I shall rest content with knowing that I protested when others were afraid and held their peace, and that I fought on with all I had when others withdrew for fear of personally inconveniencing their gentle selves for Shakspeare's sake. And I am confident that the so-called "trustees" who destroy the old houses (if they are to be destroyed) will be as execrated in years to come as Francis Gastrell, who razed Shakspeare's own house to the ground, and who—mark this well—could have been prevented from doing this had the Stratford-on-Avon Corporation honoured the memory of their greatest townsman then, as they never have honoured it, nor perhaps will ever honour it—with love and gratitude and reverence outreaching all things personal, "local," restricted, or in any way jealous and mean.

Yours faithfully,
Marie Corelli