

FURTHER DISCOVERIES OF DOMESTIC MURAL PAINTINGS

BY FRANCIS W. READER

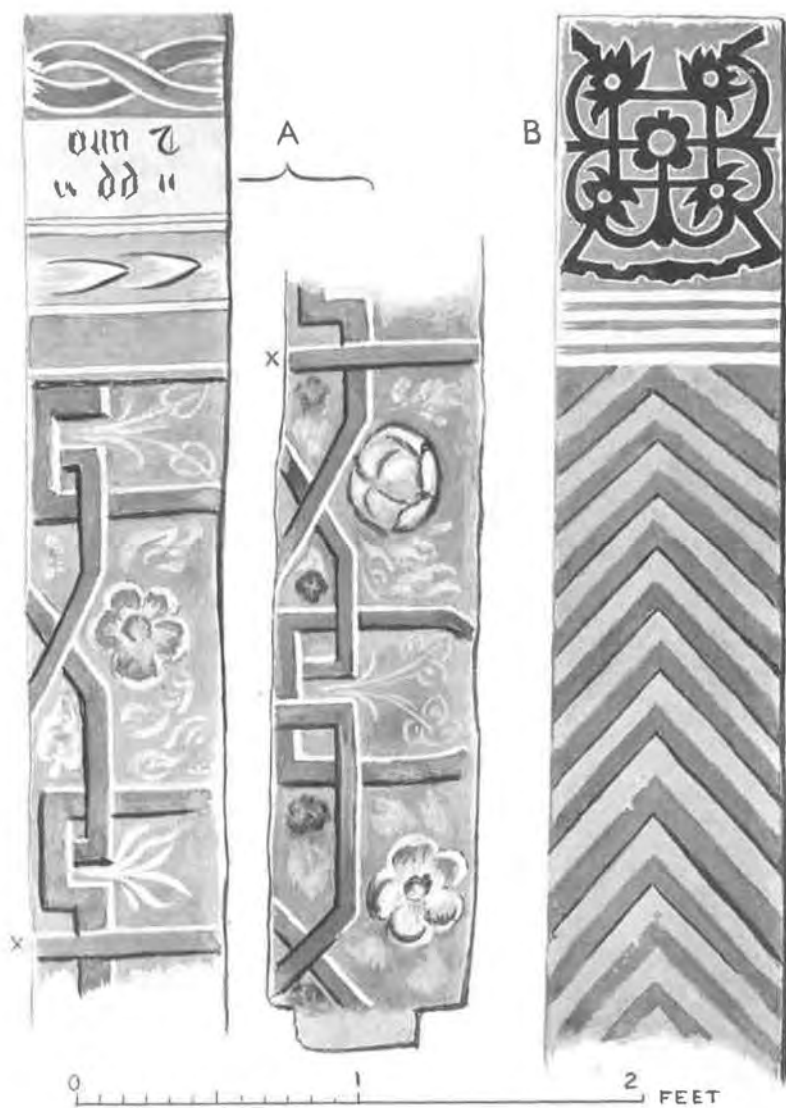
Three examples of Mural-painting have come to light since the issue of the last number of the *Records*.¹ Only one of these belong to that golden age of domestic wall-painting—the 16th century. The others are interesting examples of the 18th century revival.

The 16th century example was found at the farmhouse of Great Pednor, situated on the hills between Great Missenden and Chartridge, which had belonged to Missenden Abbey prior to the Dissolution, when it passed into the tenure, and afterwards became the property of the Weedon family, and the work to be described must have been carried out whilst they were in possession (1541-1677).

Unfortunately only a few "studs" remain to tell the story of what must have been an extensively painted house, as the "studs" have, with one exception, been taken from their original positions, in various parts of the house, and re-erected in the corner of a ground floor room, some of them having been placed upside down. More than one scheme of decoration seems to be represented, but some of them have suffered damage and it is difficult to recognise clearly what they represent.

The best preserved of them is here figured from my rough sketch (Plate I. A.). This shows the scheme to which it belonged to have consisted of a frieze, about 15 inches deep which was divided into four horizontal bands, the second of which bore an inscription in black letter on a white ground. Above this was a coiled rope pattern and below, what appear to be overlapping laurel leaves, beneath which the fourth band was of plain colour.

¹ Vol. XII., No. 7, pp. 368 and 398.



TWO PAINTED STUDS, GREAT PEDNOR

The whole of the lower part of the "stud," 4 feet 4 inches, is covered with one of those interlacing strap-work patterns, so loved by the Elizabethan craftsmen, which they developed to such bewildering intricacy.

It is clear that in this case the ornament was carried over the whole space, known as the filling, covering the plaster panels between the timbers and running regardlessly over the "studs." The strapwork is so arranged as to form a number of panels of various shapes and sizes, these being filled with floral ornaments. The colouring is a delightful scheme of low-toned reds, or pinks, with soft green, and is particularly subtle and pleasing.

A different scheme appears to have been employed in the case of the only stud remaining in its original position. This is at the side of the kitchen fire-place (Fig. 1. B.).

In this case there is a frieze of dark strap-work, 15 inches in depth, while the lower portion is simply decorated with bold cheverons in red, black and cream. It is improbable that such a decoration covered the walls, and by analogy with similar instances it seems that the studs received special treatment of a severe character, so as to frame or divide the plaster panels between them which would probably have been decorated with figure subjects, or of ornament of a quite different nature.

The original surface of the walls of this room have, at some time, been covered with lath and plaster, the marks of which are clearly to be seen on the "stud," from which it has been removed. As this covering still remains on the other walls there is a possibility of their being opened up at some future time and the original painted surface disclosed.

My best thanks are due to Mr. and Mrs. Watson for their kindness in allowing these relics to be inspected and recorded.

MANOR FARM, HUGHENDEN

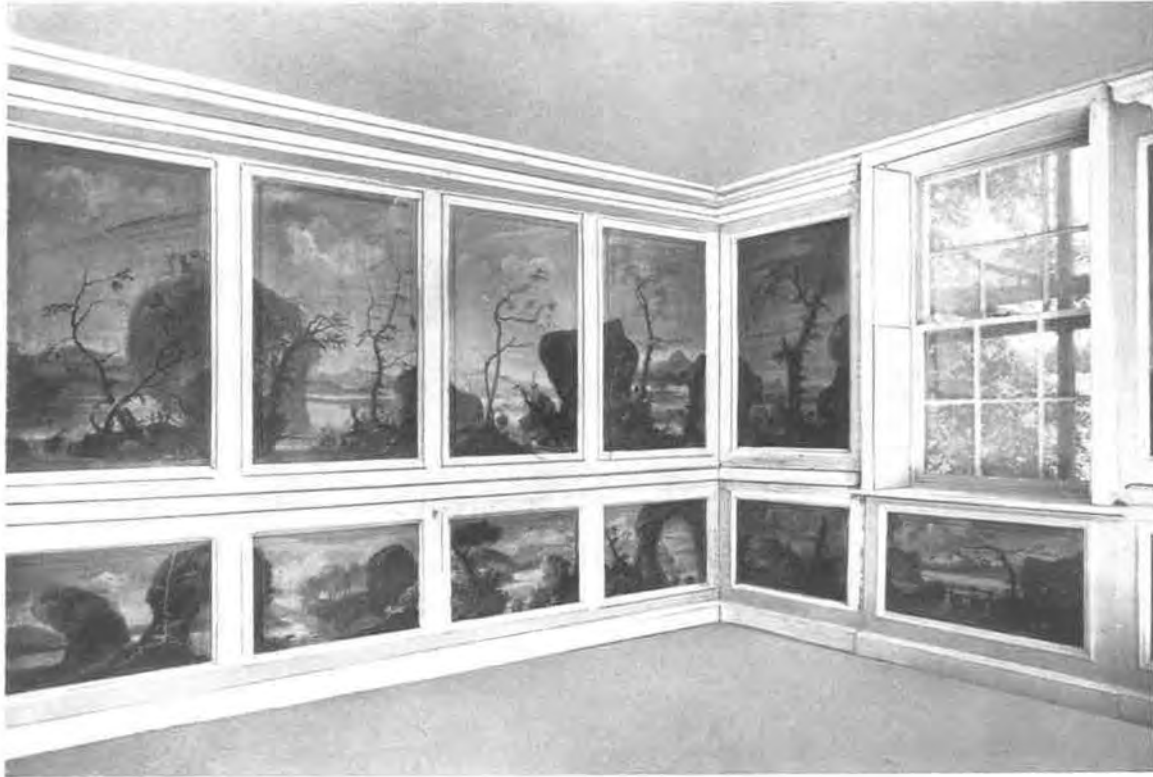
During repairs to this house in 1933, a room was stripped of wall-paper on canvas disclosing 18th century panelling, on which was painted a typical landscape decoration of the period.

The practice of mural painting which had almost ceased during the middle of the 17th century was, in a way, partially revived towards the end of that century, and became more popular during the 18th century. Little of the work of this period reached a development that can strictly be considered as the handicraft of mural painting. Most of it was painting on panels, the panelling really formed the decorative scheme, the painter being called on merely to supply details in the spaces framed by the heavy mouldings.

The painters of the period were trained not as designers of mural decoration, but as painters of easel pictures, and their imaginations were limited to a frame. They found in the panelling of their time just such a series of framed spaces as were suited to their abilities, and these they filled mostly with conventional landscapes, sometimes with classic dieties, but seldom aspired to ornament.

The best examples of this work in Bucks is to be seen at Denham Court. These are of the late 17th century date and comprise landscapes, with figures, of a sporting nature, architectural subjects and still-life groups. They are decorative in treatment and suggest Flemish influence.

The paintings at Manor Farm, Hughenden, although of no great artistic merit, form an interesting and complete example of its class. The wall has been divided into two series of panels, the lower series being smaller and forming a "dado." All the panels are framed with a "bolection" moulding of not very high relief and the two series are separated by a slight dado-rail. (Plate II.).



MANOR FARM, HUGHENDEN

The painter has endeavoured to give his work a decorative character by the device of running the landscape on the larger upper panels continuously from panel to panel, round the room, while each panel contains a picture complete in itself.

Unfortunately a great lack of decorative sense is displayed in the treatment of the lower, or pedestal panels, which demand something strong and simple so as not to detract from the main interest above. Instead these are also filled with landscapes, thus forming two horizons, and divided interest which is distinctly worrying and unsatisfactory. The consequent effect is that of a very formal picture gallery rather than a harmonious scheme of decoration.

The scenes depicted are of great uniformity, being mountainous country with lakes and rivers, with rocks and distorted, vermicular trees in the foreground. In some of them are introduced representations of men fishing and hunting game. The colour is of the joyless description characteristic of the 18th century.

The date of the paintings is probably the time of George II., but the panelling may be somewhat earlier and was evidently not intended to be painted in this manner, as the sides of the panels have been chamfered to give them relief, the effect of which has been spoiled by the painting having been carried over the chamfered edges.

Best thanks are due to Mr. and Mrs. Perks for kindly allowing the inspection of these paintings on various occasions.

“THE GEORGE AND DRAGON” INN,
CHESHAM

Our third example is in a small bed-room on the third floor of the “George and Dragon” Inn at Chesham. Although this was discovered some few years ago it does not appear to have been formally

recorded. In spite of being of the 18th century, it is at least free of many of the limitations and objections usually attaching to such works of this period. Undoubtedly it has its own demerits, but it is, at least, a mural painting, and is displayed on the bare plaster.

It is hardly conceivable that the craftsman who executed it laid any claim to being an easel-picture artist, and his work betrays no sign of his even being influenced by this almost sole medium of the painters of his time. He would appear to have been a simple, local craftsman of very limited powers, or knowledge of drawing, but possessed of the conviction that he could decorate walls. There is inner evidence that he did his best to make them beautiful, according to his lights.

Possibly, at his time many of the 16th century decorations were still surviving unobscured, as yet, by wall-papers. It is possible he may have seen more of these even than the easel pictures of his day, or at any rate, that he had received more inspiration from the earlier works. Be all this as it may, we have two sides of this little room, 12 feet by 11 feet, painted as if by tradition from over a century.

One wall bears on the right the representation of a man, about 5 feet high, with a three cornered hat, a full bottomed wig, a light blue coat with gold braid and wide skirts. The star of the garter is on the left breast, and depending from a red sash is a "George." With his right hand he holds a long gold-headed cane, and all round him are floral devices displayed in rather a sampler-like fashion. In the extreme right-hand corner over his head is a looped up lace curtain. (Plate III.).

On the left, the painting becomes irregularly constricted, perhaps to avoid some fixture, and in this portion is represented a stag pursued by dogs of greyhound type; the landscape is indicated by a group of



“GEORGE AND DRAGON,” CHESHAM



"GEORGE AND DRAGON," CHESHAM

trees beneath which grow flowers of the field. Above them is a large flight of birds, one of which has settled on the gold knob of the cane.

So primitive and cypher-like is the composition that it recalls the art of the cave-man or the Red Indian. The width of the painting is about 9 feet 6 inches.

Miss Thalassa Cruso, to whom a photograph was submitted, pronounces the costume to be of about 1715. It seems fair to assume therefore that the person here represented, who is certainly someone of distinction, may be meant for King George 1st, it having been thought suitable to mark his accession in a house bearing his name.²

The other wall has a purely ornamental design covering a space of 10 feet 6 inches in width and about 6 feet in height. (Plate IV.). It mainly consists of floral forms interspersed with various birds and two little old gentlemen in 18th century costume, one indulging in a pipe, the other apparently taking snuff. The flowers are highly conventional, but prominent among them seem to be the snake's head fritillary (*Fritillaria meleagris*). This flower known at Ford, in Dinton parish, where it grows, as "frawcup." (*rectius* frogcup), seems to have some local significance having still a Sunday in the year dedicated in its honour.

Elementary as these paintings are, they form a very interesting and novel example of the period.

² Although the correct title of this house is the "George and Dragon," it has long been known as the "George." Recently the sign has been painted in this abbreviated form.