

# THE WALL PAINTINGS AT Nos. 1 & 2 MARKET HILL, BUCKINGHAM

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## GENERAL

The total loss of this property in 1967 with most of its contents, fixtures and fittings, was one of the most grievous, among many such losses in recent years, that the county has suffered. It was one of the most interesting and important houses in Buckingham and could have become a show place. Its demolition, for commercial interests, though quite unjustified, did at least give an opportunity for detailed inspection, analysis and record, though little could be salvaged from the wreck. It must have been one of the few important early timbered houses to escape the devastating fires that ravaged the town in the 18th century. Its loss, in the 20th is the more to be deplored.

Mr. Christopher Gowing, Curator of the County Museum, Aylesbury, kept a careful eye on events and kindly kept me informed. The Ancient Monuments Department of the Ministry of Works were interested and made many valuable records; and Mr. Cecil Farthing of the National Monuments Record had a comprehensive series of photographs taken. To all these I would express my thanks and indebtedness.

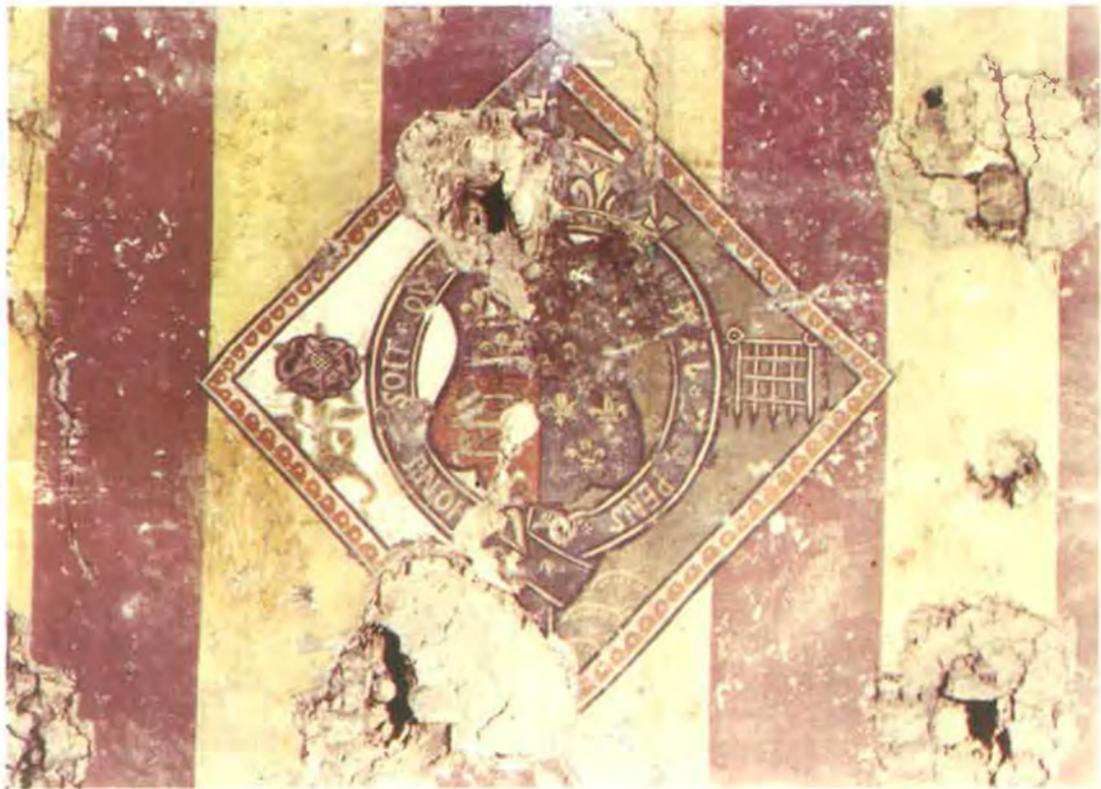
I spent some considerable time in the house during its demolition (when I was fortunate to escape serious injury) making records of the various paintings, uncovering and observing as best I could in difficult conditions. It is hoped at some future time to publish a detailed account of the structure which would supplement the rather meagre description in the Royal Commission's Volume,<sup>1</sup> to which reference may be made for the basic facts. Mrs. Elvey has gone into the documentary side, her account follows this paper, and throws much light on the probable date of some of the paintings and the individuals with which they might be associated. Photographs of the property concerned, before, and during demolition, are shown in Plates IA and IB, and Fig. 1 shows the site in plan.

## THE PAINTINGS.

It was well known that the house contained wall paintings. The late Mr. F. W. Reader and I visited it in 1937 or before when re-wiring work revealed that a false ceiling had been inserted in the main room on the ground floor leaving a space of some 2 feet between it and the floor of the bedroom above. Through a hole in this floor where boards had been taken up, we were able, with the aid of electric torches, to see a very elaborate painted frieze, with a central ornament of foliage, flanked by birds, griffins or dolphins, and circular medallions containing initials. The skill and general accuracy of Mr. Reader's observation and drawing, made under such difficult conditions, was strikingly demonstrated when the whole scheme of painting came to be revealed later.<sup>2</sup> They should be compared with plates IIB and IIIA showing details of the frieze.

<sup>1</sup> *R. C. H. M. Bucks., North.* (1913) 76a.

<sup>2</sup> This fragment of painting was published and illustrated in *Arch. Journal* XCIII (1937) 242 and fig. 6.



No's 1 & 2 Market Hill, Buckingham.

Detail of Tudor Royal Arms in ground floor room. Floral decoration of earlier scheme visible in second quarter where surface has flaked off. National Monuments Record.

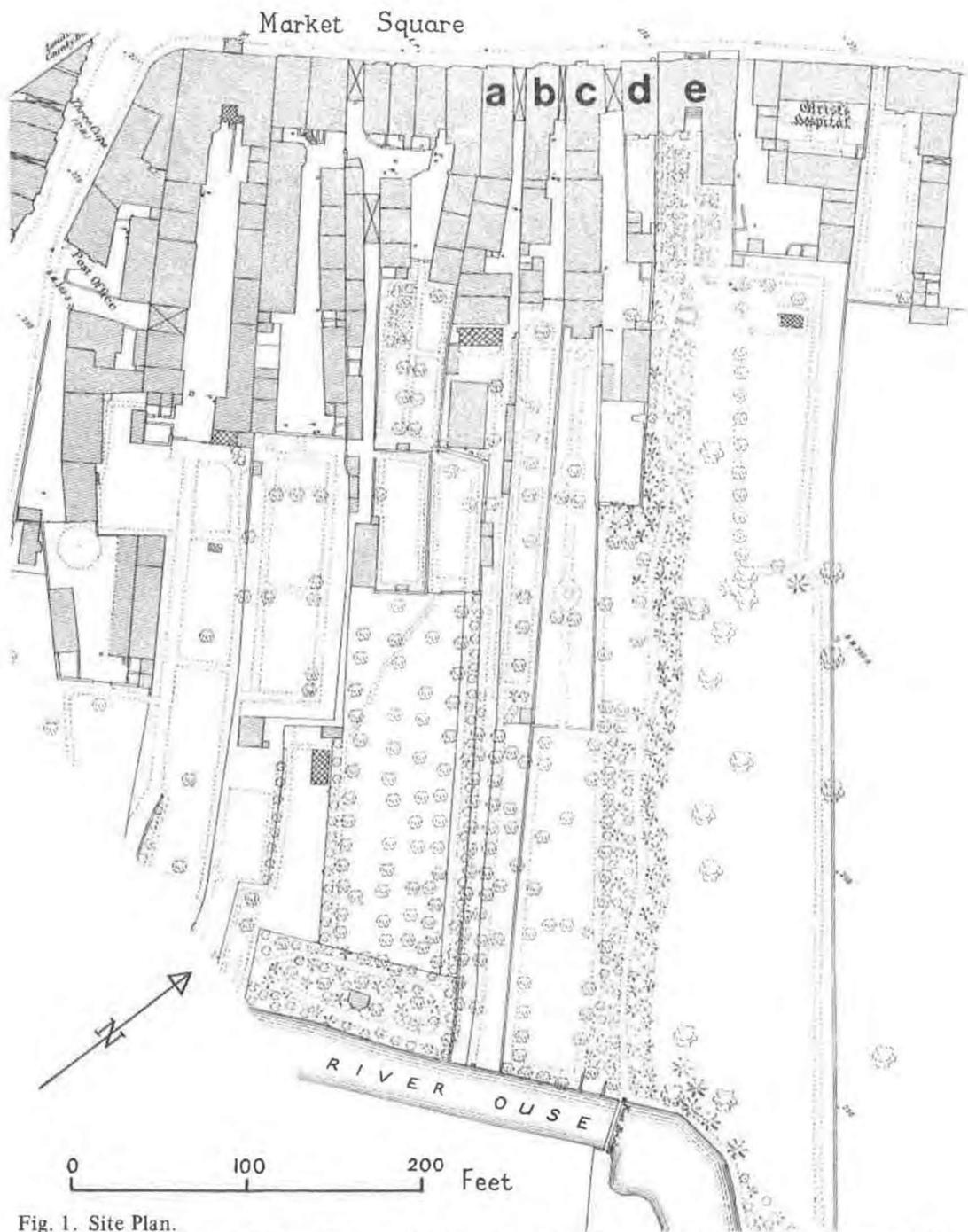


Fig. 1. Site Plan.

Key: (a) No. 9 Market Square; (b) No. 10 Market Square; (c) No 1 Market Hill (d) No 2 Market Hill; (e) The White House.

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey 1/500 map (1881).



Plate I A Street front of the house before demolition. National Monuments Record.

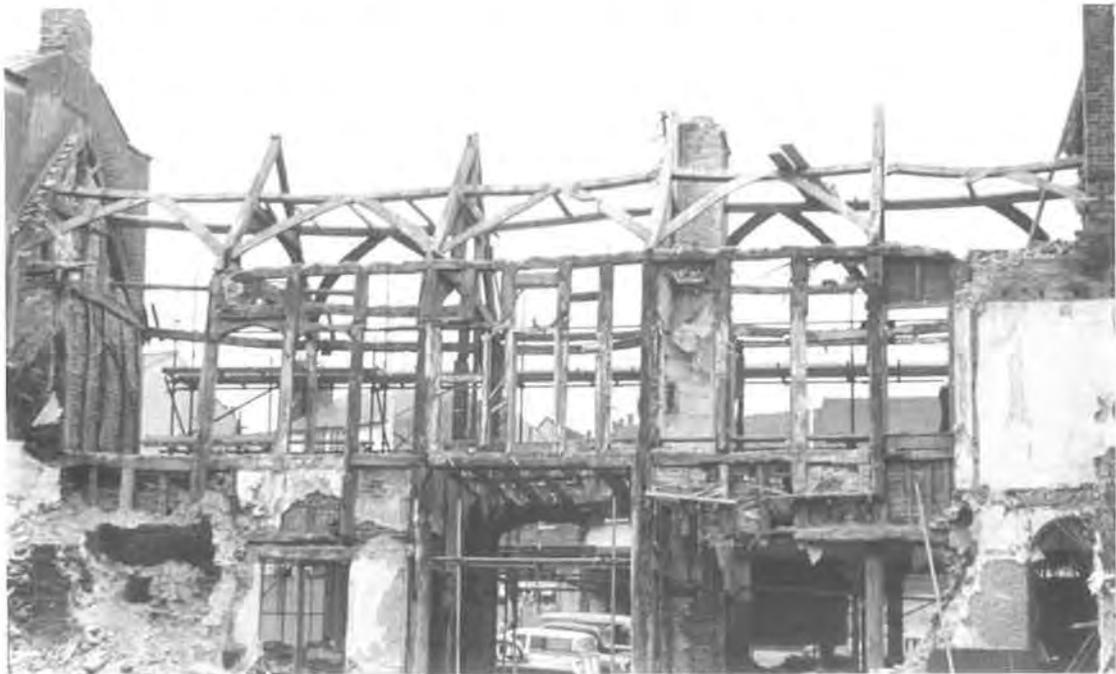


Plate I B Back of the house partly demolished, to show timber frame, roof trusses, entrance arch, etc. Bucks County Museum



Plate II A Ground floor room before removal of later panelling. National Monuments Record.

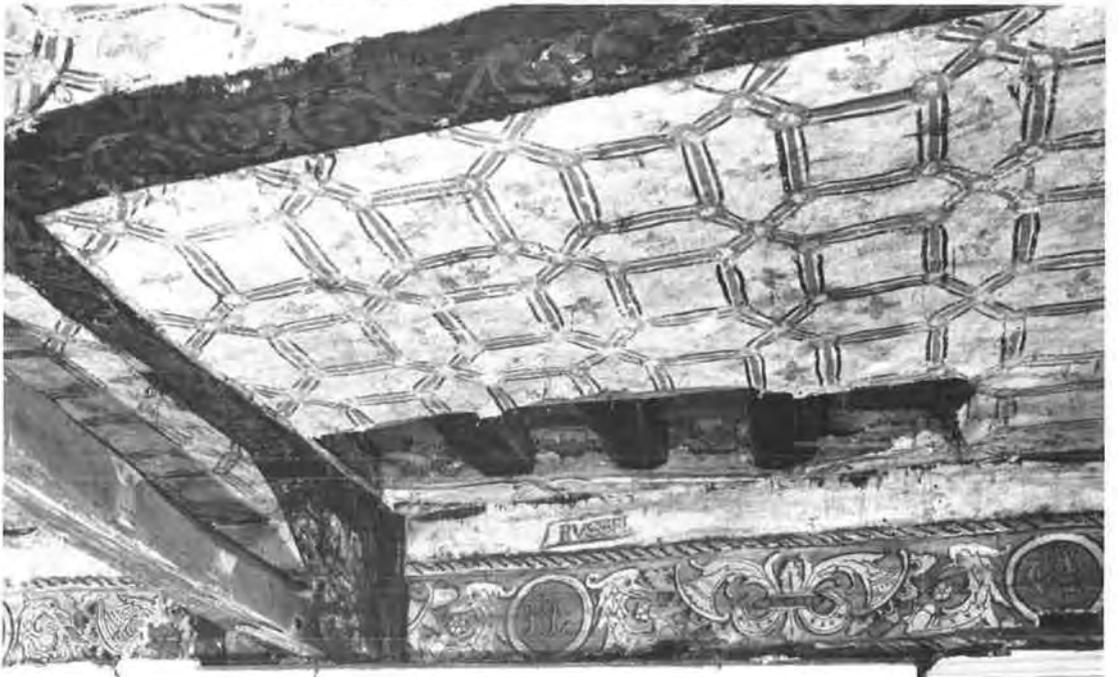


Plate II B Detail of painted ceiling, frieze and painted beams. National Monuments Record.

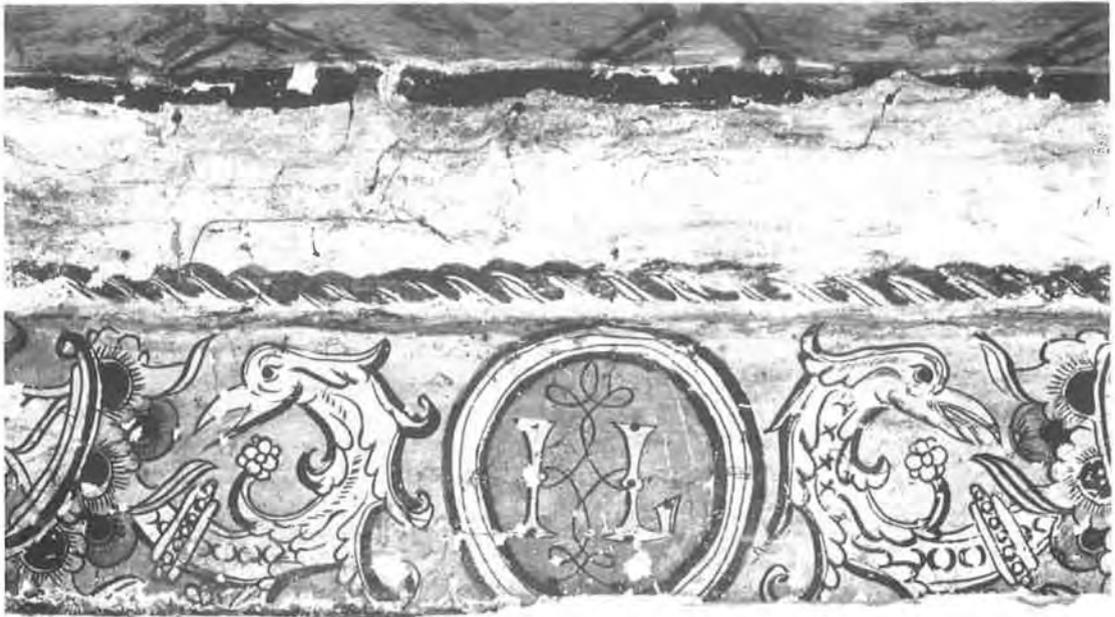


Plate III A Detail of initials I. L. in frieze. National Monuments Record.

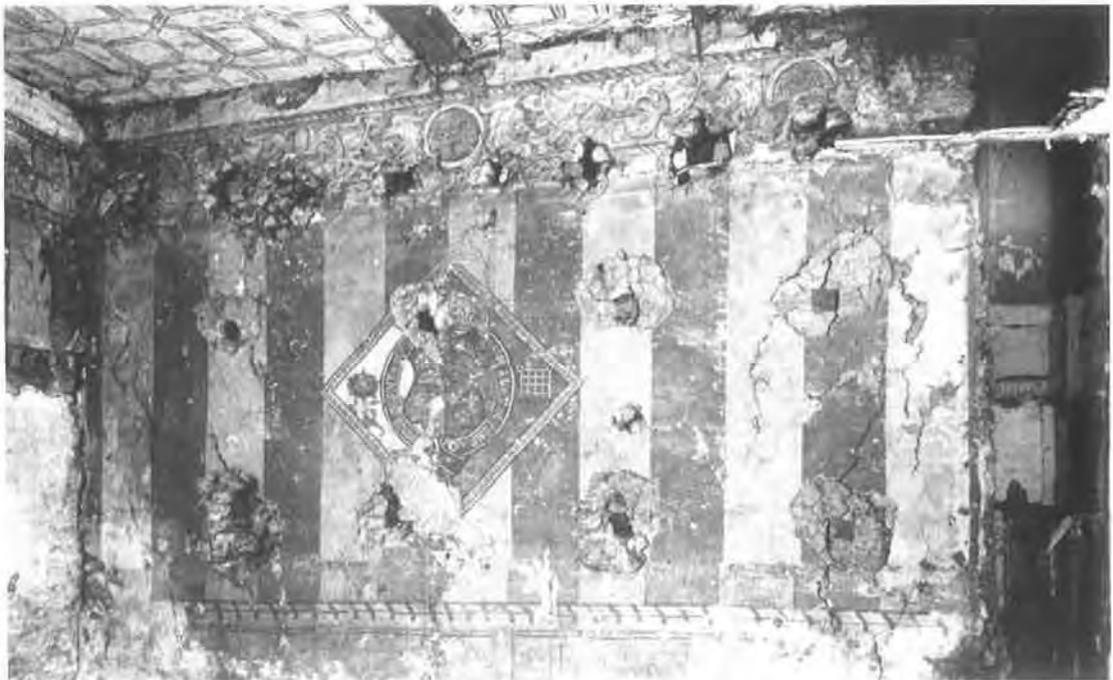


Plate III B End wall of ground floor room showing Royal Arms, stripes, battlemented dado, etc. National Monuments Record.



Plate IV A Detail to show diagonal band with blackletter inscription below scheme, and flowered background. National Monuments Record.



Plate IV B First-floor room. Black and white painted scheme with frieze above blocked earlier door and window frames. National Monuments Record.



Plate V A  
First floor room. Detail of classical decorated column, with scroll  
dado below. National Monuments Record.



Plate V B  
Painted timber upright, with frieze, and remains of later panelling.  
National Monuments Record.



Plate VI A Detail of painted roof timbers, tie beams, collars, purlins and braces. National Monuments Record.



Plate VI B Front carved bracket in front right corner - ? within a quatrefoil. National Monuments Record.

But until demolition work was well advanced the extent, quality and interest of the wall paintings was not fully realised. As stated in Records,<sup>3</sup> painting was found in three or four rooms; and there was evidence of at least two periods, and differing styles.

## DETAILS

(a) The most complete scheme occurred in the main room on the ground floor on the right of the entrance archway. It was virtually intact as revealed by the removal of 17th century panelling. It had a number of unusual features. The ceiling itself was painted to represent a moulded, panelled, Elizabethan plaster ceiling, having squares surrounded by elongated hexagons. (Plate IIB.) F. W. Reader noted a similar treatment, but on a wall, at Paramour Grange, West Marsh, Isle of Sheppey, and traced a similarity through engravings, to the ceiling of Wolsey's Closet at Hampton Court.<sup>4</sup> There was black outline throughout, the squares and "mouldings" being in ochre, with pink circles at the intersection of the ribs, and grey flower motifs in the spaces. The timber beams and brackets of the original ceiling, not those of the 17th century inserted false ceiling associated with the panelling, were also painted, the beams being dark red with a continuous scroll in a lighter red. The braces or brackets of this period had a crowned fleur de lys, (Plate IIB) The scroll decoration was repeated on the timbers of the rooms on the floor above and on the roof timbers above an inserted ceiling. These beams must originally have been open from the first-floor room level, ceiled at the collar beams, before the insertion of an intermediate ceiling. This method of embellishment was common in the late 16th and early 17th century, some of the best examples being the painted ceiling of Duke Humfrey's Library in the Bodleian, Oxford, (re-fitting 1598-1602) and the roof of the Old Library, Christchurch, Oxford (circa 1610).<sup>5</sup>

We come next to the frieze; and immediately below the ceiling was a plain white area, with draped or scalloped top, apparently representing hanging linen. Below this came the decorative frieze proper, some 1 foot 6 inches in depth, commencing with a twist or guilloche band at the top. In the frieze were circular medallions containing initials linked by a cord, and the decorative elements already noted, except that the foliage motifs drawn by Reader had in fact cornucopias incorporated; the background was a pale blue-grey, the initials in yellow on a red centre, the medallion outlined in white, the central ornament in black and white picked out in red. It was terminated below by another guilloche or twist band.

The initials are important. The I.L. is the predominant one in a decorated Roman script. There were others difficult to decipher, in a fanciful blackletter type of script. Perhaps another may have been I.A. or I.J. Initials linked by a cord enabled the individuals concerned to be identified at the Golden Cross, Oxford, and a date 1595 assigned to the painting.

Mrs. Elvey has suggested, for reasons which appear below, that the I.L. stood for John Lambert III, head of the principal family in Buckingham in the later 16th century who held the office of Bailiff. In one part of the white drapery band above the frieze was the name RUSSEL on a scroll – so far unexplained, though apparently contemporary with the main scheme, to judge by the similarity of the lettering. Mrs. Elvey has suggested

3. *Records of Bucks*, XVIII (1966), 96 and *Ibid.* (1967), 170-171.

4. See *Arch. Journal* XCVIII (1942), 197-200, and plate X. Another instance of painting representing a moulded plaster ceiling is in a house called "Thurnalls" in Royston, Herts.

5. *Oxoniensia*, XXVI/XXVII (1961/2) 215-243 and several plates.

that this might in fact be the signature or name of the actual painter, Burial of a Russel early in the 17th century is recorded in the Parish Register of Buckingham (Plate IIB).

Below the frieze the walls had been covered with 17th-century panelling painted white, with an elaborate overmantel, and some arcading with Ionic and Doric pilasters. (Plate IIA). On the removal of this, the whole wall painting scheme was revealed, though terribly damaged by the hacking out of the pegs or plugs used to fix the panelling. It was of a most unusual and spectacular kind. The entire wall surfaces were painted with 1-foot wide yellow and dark red stripes, ending in an embattled dado the top of which was 3 feet 10 inches from the floor. (Plate IIB). In the centre of the South wall was a 30-inch square frame with scalloped border in red painted lozenge-wise containing the Tudor Royal Arms – France and England quarterly – under a crown, and encircled by the Garter with the royal motto. (Colour Frontispiece and Plate IIIB). The lozenge was divided per pale white and green, and in the dexter side was a red Tudor rose, and in the sinister side a portcullis – both being prominent Tudor badges.

The whole nature of this scheme and the prominence of the Tudor Royal Arms as the central feature suggests the commemoration of some important event, or the use of the house as a Court Room, or that the owner was a public officer of some kind.

(b) In one place, where this painted surface had flaked or broken away round one of the holes made for wooden pegs to support the panelling, I detected traces of an earlier layer of painting. Since it was clearly going to be impossible to save the later scheme, neither time nor money nor assistance being available, I commenced uncovering the earlier painting (after the upper scheme had been thoroughly recorded) to try and determine its nature.

It proved to consist of an all-over pattern of flowers and foliage – and possibly including animals and birds in the nature of a French verdure tapestry – on a dark green background, the details being in white, pale brown and blue. Across this went diagonal (i.e. bend-wise) scrolls or bands about 1 foot wide, their bases being about 30 inches apart, in a pale purple-red, outlined in white, all with inscriptions in blackletter script, painted white. (Plate IVA). This type of scheme is not uncommon, the best example being the extensive wall painting in the Flushing Inn, Rye, Sussex, recorded and discussed by F. W. Reader.<sup>6</sup> These inscriptions were somewhat fragmentary, and the time for uncovering was very short, working with the house being demolished about one, so that only a small area could be exposed. Having done this, I asked the National Monuments Record to photograph them after spraying, so that study of the prints might enable a reading to be made. But in spite of earnest entreaty to hold up the demolition for a few days longer, by the time the N.M.R. photographer arrived, the whole room had been destroyed. The words were separated by little foliage scrolls or sprigs and I have no doubt one could have got at the interpretation had time allowed. The wording was in English; and on one scroll I could read ALL TASTE THE . . . . . on another . . . SHALL BE CUT OFF . . . . . on another . . . AND A MAN . . . . .; and on a fourth . . . . . HAVE . . . . . P.DE. . . . .

6. Tudor Domestic Wall Paintings, in *Arch. Journal* XCII (1936), 257–60, plate VI, and *Arch. Journ.* XCIII (1937), 221–2. This painting was originally dated at 1547, the year of the accession of Edward VI. But later heraldic evidence, since the frieze contains the arms of Jane Seymour, Henry VIII's third wife whom he married in 1536, suggests that the painting may commemorate that event, or her death in 1537/8. See post. p.299.

A study of Cruden's Concordance failed to reveal any really likely Biblical text, except for the second quoted above, where there are more than a dozen quotations for . . . "shall be cut off." It seems more likely that moral sayings from a secular source were what we had, or – a favourite source for such things – one of the Books of the Apocrypha, Ecclesiasticus being often used.

The dating of these two schemes will be discussed later.

Three rooms on the first floor also had schemes of painting, of a totally different character, forming one of the most extensive painted interiors in the whole county, and by its quality and variety further emphasising the importance of the property.

(c) In the front room, above the painted room on the ground floor described above, the scheme was in Italian Renaissance classical style in black and white (black outline on a white background), painted in the 'antique' or 'grotesque' manner as described by Henry Peacham.<sup>7</sup> There were vertical features in the form of fantastic columns and capitals dividing the decorative work, as at the Golden Cross, Oxford; The Shire Hall, Wilmington, Kent; Manor Farm, Loughton, Bucks., and many other places. At the top there was a frieze 2 feet deep between narrow borders, with panels at intervals supported by putti or winged cherubs enclosing blackletter inscriptions reading alternately FEARE GOD, and DRED GOD. Included in the design were putti, men with banners, fleurs de lys, crowns, snakes, horses and a wealth of fanciful elements of the most sophisticated kind. The scheme was terminated at the base by a running scroll band 18 inches to 2 feet from the floor. The beams were painted with a light red scroll on a dark red background as in the room below. (Plates IVB, VA and VB).

These paintings were strikingly similar to those in the Manor House at Loughton, Bucks., not all that far away.<sup>8</sup> There, the main area of the wall was divided by narrow bands having a zig-zag motif enclosing palmettes, while the principal feature consisted of medallions supported by grotesques containing classical heads. There was also a broad frieze with framed panels inscribed FEARE GOD, in blackletter. The work was executed in black outline on white, not white on a black background as at the Golden Cross, Oxford.

(d) The adjoining room to this had an unusual scheme, which it was only possible to record in a most perfunctory manner before the whole was destroyed. There appear to have been foot-wide stripes, as in the ground-floor room. They were in blue/grey and white. There was a dark coloured frieze, and again the timbers were red.

(e) In a room on the other side of the entrance archway, also on the first floor, there seems to have been an even more elaborate scheme. But here again, the time that it was possible to spend in the house only allowed a very brief period for uncovering and recording, and much of the work was fragmentary.

As far as I could discover, the treatment consisted, again, of broad vertical stripes, but this time in dark maroon and white; and in this instance the stripes themselves were ornamented. The dark stripes had decorated, diamond-shaped motifs in bright red; while the white stripes had received a floral brocade in cream or pale green. The main

7. Henry Peacham, *The Gentleman's Exercise* (1612) 49–50, quoted by me in *Oxoniensia* XX (1955), 87–8, and *Bodleian Library Record* V, No. 6 (1956), 305.

8. Originally recorded and illustrated in *R.C.H.M., Bucks., North* (1913), 183 and plate opp. p. 178, and referred to in *Records.*, XVI (1953–60), 365 and plate I, when extensions to the scheme were found. See also plate XIX facing p. 281 in *Arch. Journ.* XCII (1936).

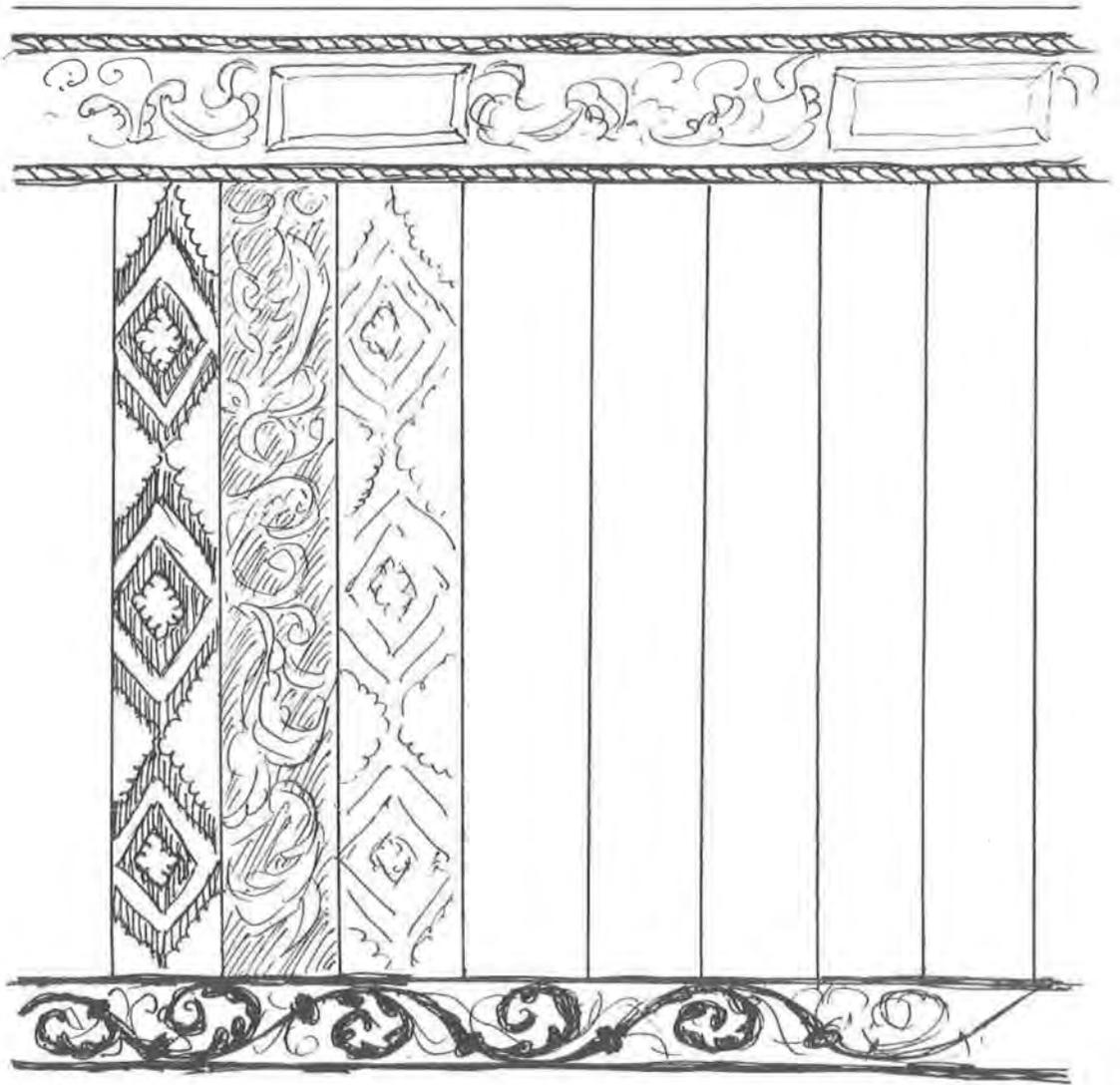


Fig. 2. Sketch, part reconstruction of painted decoration in first floor room.

decoration was finished by the usual deep frieze at the top, and a scroll dado band at the base as in (c), carried over the timbers. (See Fig. 2)

(f) These upper rooms must at one time have been open to the roof, ceiled at collar beam level, for the main timbers here in the roof space above an inserted ceiling, were elaborately decorated in exactly the same manner as the timbers in the rooms below and in that on the ground floor. The background was entirely painted in dark red, with scroll-work in a lighter red. The purlins and subsidiary timbers received a simpler scroll, but the tie beams, collar-beams and curved braces all had a more elaborate and complicated scroll. (Plate VIA)

#### DATING.

As has been already said (ante, p.295) this treatment of beams with painted scroll-work was not unusual, though the Oxford examples I have quoted are all rather late (1598, 1602, 1610). The Royal Commission dates the Loughton – black and white – painting as late 16th century, though Reader in his many valuable papers in the *Archaeological Journal* quotes examples from about the middle of the 16th century to near the end, preferring a date somewhere within the third quarter (1550–75) as a good mean date. Since it is likely that all this later decoration is approximately of one date, though differing in style and detail, it could have been carried out for John Lambert III as suggested by Mrs. Elvey. She gives reasons for considering that this house was originally the mansion of the Fowler family, and that in 1591 they sold it to him. Since in 1592 a protracted lawsuit began over his title to this property, she proposes the date 1591–2 for the later decorations. It is highly satisfactory that documentary grounds have been produced for suggesting such a firm date for these paintings.

The earlier painting in the ground floor room might well have been part of the original decoration of the house, and a date early in the first half of the 16th century seems likely. The painting in the Flushing Inn at Rye, already mentioned (above p.296) was dated by Mr. Everard Green, on heraldic evidence to the year 1547, the date of the accession of Edward VI. Though Dr. I. F. Salzman prefers 1537, the year of Jane Seymour's death, since her arms appear on a lozenge in the frieze.<sup>9</sup> The quarterings of ESTURMI (4), MACKWILLIAM (5) and COCKER (6) can just be distinguished at the base of the damaged lozenge. I feel that the Buckingham example may be earlier than this, since one has to allow a reasonable time to elapse before the superimposition of the later painting.

The preference by the later artist at Buckingham for schemes based on broad vertical stripes, which occurred in three of the rooms, is most unusual. I know of no other 16th-century examples, though broad grey and white stripes do occur in Pepys's house at Brampton, Hunts., probably 17th-century. One is familiar with the use of upright timbers, painted, to divide formal designs, though more usually they were painted in with the rest of the design, the joins between plaster and timber being masked by paper, linen or even thin leather pasted over and painted out. Occasionally, artificial uprights, representing timbers, were painted on the plaster as part of a design. And there are many examples of painted representations of decorated panelling.<sup>10</sup> But the deliberate use of foot-wide stripes of two colours, undecorated except in one room at Buckingham, is most unusual.

<sup>9</sup> Discussed by F. W. Reader in *Arch. Journ.* XCIII (1937) 221–2.

<sup>10</sup> See especially *Arch. Journ.* XCVIII, 202–205 and numerous plates and figures.

In conclusion, one must regret once again the complete destruction of this important property, but be thankful that a reasonably complete record of it and its contents was made. I am most grateful for help and co-operation in the preparation of this part of the paper, in particular to Mr. C. Gowing of the Aylesbury Museum, and Mr. and Mrs. G. R. Elvey. Finally, Plate VIB shows a carved bracket on the front of the house, as evidence of its quality and importance.