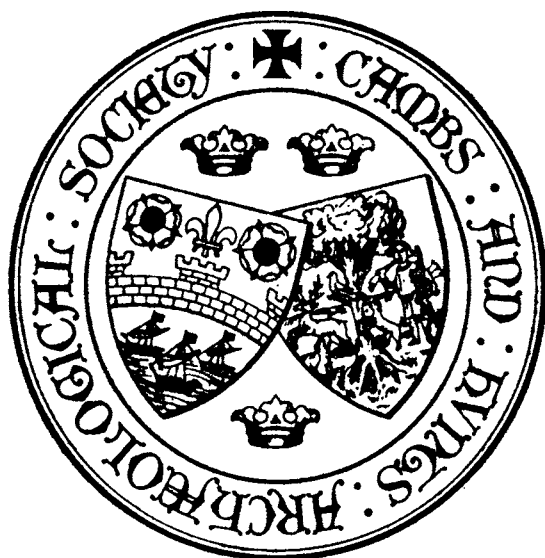


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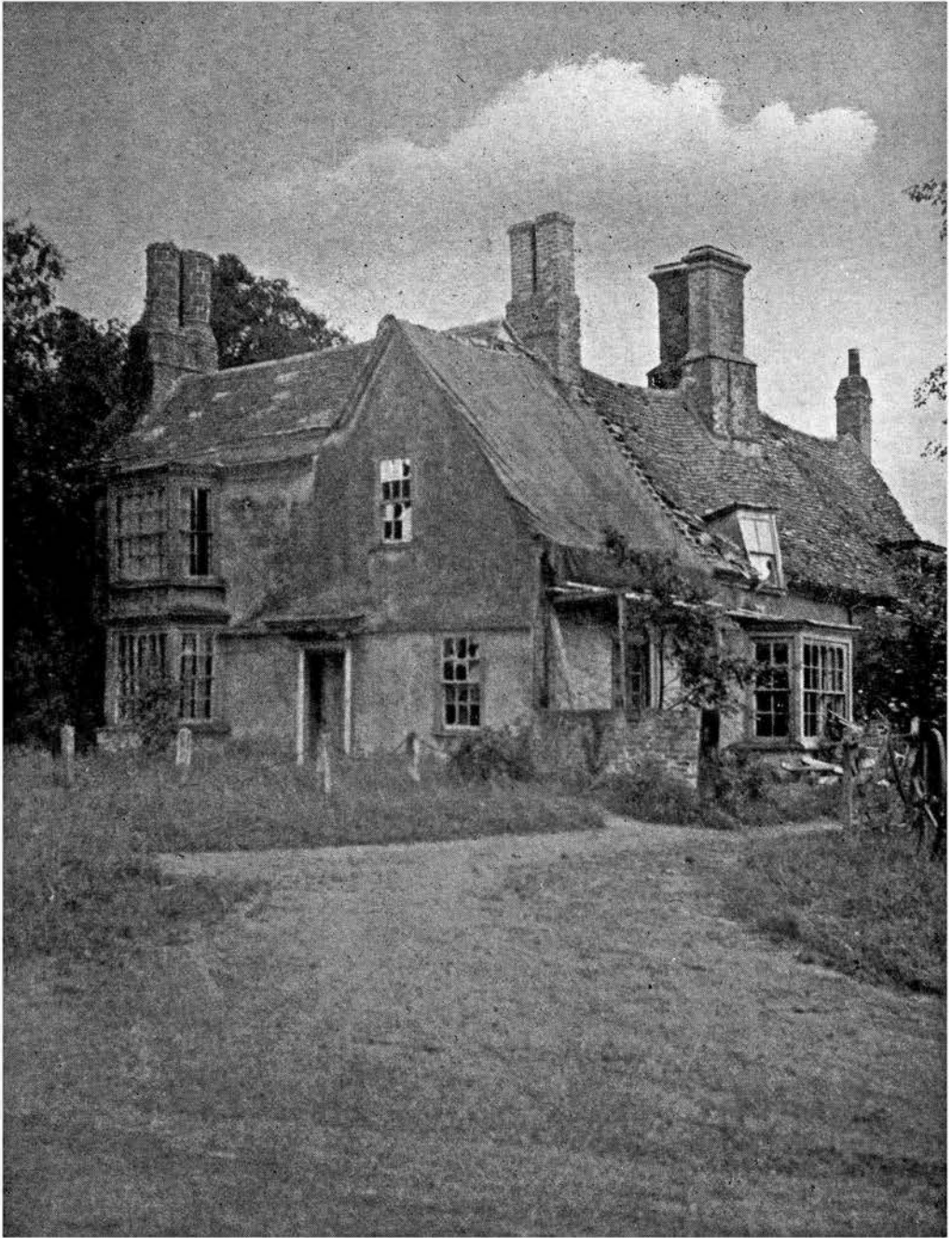
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PARK FARM, HILTON

PARK FARM, HILTON

by DAVID GARNETT

Park Farm, on Hilton Green, is now a ruin of which little but the chimney stack remains. A note on this lovely sixteenth century little house and the paintings it contained may be of interest. In the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, Huntingdonshire, p.139, it is stated: "On the first floor there is said to be a Stuart Royal Arms and Prince of Wales' feathers painted on plaster, but now covered up."

The house was then inhabited by old Mrs. Britten; its condition was bad, as there was rot in the floors and in the wooden frames supporting cob walls. After her death, I persuaded Mr. Chris. Britten to sell me the house, intending to offer it to the village as the site of a village hall, to be built behind the front rooms, which would be preserved. Shortly after I had bought it, village boys uncovered the Royal Arms above the fireplace, and the Prince of Wales' feathers on the wall facing, in the principal bedroom. These paintings were dated 1632, the year of Charles II.'s birth. I wrote a short account of the paintings which was published, with photographs, in the "Times" of August 24th, 1939. Any hopes that this would catch the attention of the world and result in a flood of donations for the village hall, were dispelled by the events of the following week, and I myself was not in a position to take further interest in the old house until I returned to Hilton after the war. Unfortunately, before the outbreak of war, the most unsound parts of the roof had been stripped, and though covered with tarpaulins, had not been retiled. An architect's examination, in the summer of 1945, confirmed the obvious conclusion that Park Farm had become beyond repair. It was, indeed, a wreck, which the village boys had made their castle. But the principal bedroom had been kept padlocked, and though rain came in abundantly, the Royal Arms and Prince of Wales' feathers were but little damaged.

The room below was low-ceilinged; the oak floor was full of holes, but the eighteenth century pine panelling on the walls was in excellent condition. My son, William, and I decided to save it for use in Hilton Hall, and proceeded to remove the end opposite the fireplace. It came away in one piece which it needed both of us to support;

but a glance behind it revealed painted figures on the wall, dressed in late Elizabethan, or Jacobean dress. There were three complete half-length portraits, two of which seemed to depict the same woman, and one damaged painting, half of which had been destroyed in changing the position of the doorway when the room was panelled in the 18th century.

Each portrait was framed in a painted architectural archway; each of the three complete ones had an animal and a legend, in gothic lettering below, which showed that the animal depicted had an affinity in subject with the portrait. Below the portraits the walls were bare, but a few fragments of moulded oak showed that there had originally been oak panelling reaching about half-way up the room. Unfortunately, if any paintings had existed on the other walls, they had been obliterated when the 18th century panelling had been put up.

By good fortune I informed my friend, T. H. White, of my discovery and he remembered having seen an entry in the catalogue of the Stowe collection of engravings which corresponded with the painting I described. (Catalogue of the engraved British portraits removed from Stowe House sold by Sotheby and Co., Monday, March 5th, 1849).

The entry on p.88, Lot 792, is: *Moll Cut Purse three quarters, in an elegant dress, holding in her right hand a mirror, an eagle flying behind her shoulder.*

*Not so quick sighted, is the Eagle for her prey,
As I new fashions spie, to make me gay.*

Note.—This extremely rare original of this extraordinary woman is not mentioned by Granger. It presents her as an elegant and beautiful woman, so different from the other portrait of her, of which a copy and drawing accompany this.

Sir Henry Hake, was able to discover an example of this engraving in the National Portrait Gallery. It was identical with the Park Farm painting and it was obvious that one had either been copied from the other, or both had been copied from a common original. It was clear also that the companion portrait must also be of Moll Cutpurse. In that she is represented blowing smoke from her lips, holding a clay pipe in one hand and a narrow stein glass in the other; there

is a monkey on her knee and the blackletter legend reads:

*Nonsense is nonsense though it please my mind
But is not proper to my sex and kind.*

The third complete portrait portrays a different woman playing a lute, with a stag looking at her, and the legend is:

*Maydes should be seen, not hearde so am I,
I am sure you do not hear my melodie.*

The paintings are brightly coloured, in excellent preservation, painted on plaster on a Norfolk reed substratum.

My first concern was to protect them from malicious damage, my next their preservation. Sir Leigh Ashton, came down and saw them, as a result of which I gave them to the Victoria and Albert Museum. Two skilled carpenters from the Museum and carefully cut out the paintings, plaster and Norfolk reed, they were carefully packed and removed to London, as were also the Royal Arms and Prince of Wales' feathers. The Museum did not need the Royal Arms and returned it, and I presented it to Hilton Parish Church in which it now hangs over the chancel arch. The damaged figure I have kept for myself. The portraits of Moll Cutpurse (Mary Frith) and the unknown lutanist are on exhibition in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

It is interesting that two portraits of Mary Frith, the heroine of Middleton's play, "The Roaring Girl," should have been painted on the walls of Park Farm during her lifetime. She lived through the Civil Wars, during which she held up and robbed General Fairfax, and she died in 1659, leaving her money that a conduit in Holborn should run with wine on the event of the Restoration.

It is clear that the inhabitants of Park Farm, Hilton, were also Royalists, at a time when so many of their neighbours were Puritans. The house itself was built, many years before the paintings, by a Royalist, since the moulded bricks of the chimney bore roses and fleurs-de-lys.

I think we may assume that the family living at Park Farm was named Sparrow. For the turf maze and obelisk, erected by William Sparrow, Gentleman, in 1661, to commemorate the Restoration is within a few yards of the front door of Park Farm. A Sparrow of

Hilton claimed the right to bear arms in the Heralds' visitation of the county. It would have been a former generation of Royalist Sparrows who put up the Royal Arms in the principal bedroom and decorated the dining room with portraits of the notorious heroine of the "Roaring Girl." Whether she was a "pin-up girl" of the period or had some more intimate connection with Mr. Sparrow of Hilton, is a matter on which we must speculate in vain.

I may add that the 18th century panelling from the dining room at Park Farm has been used to line a new room added by my sons to Hilton Hall and the room in question is lighted by one of its beautiful bow windows.

AN EARLY SAXON AND ROMAN SITE HEMINGFORD GREY

On a report received from the Sand and Gravel Co., that pottery was being dug up from a field No. 83 in the Ordnance Survey Map of 1902, I visited the site and there saw at the edge of the gravel digging a layer of ash 2 feet 6 inches below the surface. From it I dug out two sherds of coarse pottery,, and two fragments of clay rings. The men rescued several sherds of coarse gritty pottery with bases flattened; three whole pottery rings blackened by fire, and several fragments. They stated that a whole pot and many pieces had fallen into the water.

From the same field the men rescued a quantity of Roman pottery. The finds are housed in the Norris Museum, St. Ives.

C. M. Coote.



TWO PORTRAITS OF MARY FRITH *alias* MOLL CUTPURSE



LUTE PLAYER



PRINCE OF WALES'S FEATHERS IN FARM BEDROOM



UNIDENTIFIED PORTRAIT, NOW AT HILTON HALL

