

## DISCOVERIES OF MURAL PAINTINGS AT BRAMLEY.

BY

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IN the course of extensive repairs and alterations carried out by Mr. and Mrs. Van Lessen to the old Court House, or Manor House, at Bramley, in the autumn and winter of 1925-6, some very interesting discoveries have been made. I was informed of these by our active Local Secretary, Miss Olive Heath, in January, 1926, and was able, with her kind assistance, to visit the house on January 28, and so meet its courteous owners, who are fully alive to its high archæological value and have been doing their utmost to preserve every ancient feature that has been brought to light.

The house itself must not be confounded with the manor-house of Bramley East which stands on the opposite side of the road—a brick and stone building, with three gables to the main front. In writing an account of Bramley for the *Victoria History of Surrey*,<sup>1</sup> I noted as follows: “Bramley East was the name both of a house and a manor; the house is a three-gabled brick and stone building, nicely proportioned. Opposite to it is a far more interesting half-timber house, the details of which recall Great Tangley manor-house, in the adjoining parish of Wonersh. Tangley Manor was rebuilt by Mr. Caryll in Elizabeth’s reign. He was also lord of Bramley East. The date of the latter may be about 1560 [*c.* 1580 is nearer the date.—P. M. J.]. The most valuable feature is a two-storeyed gabled staircase wing, resembling those at Rake and Shottermill, in which the timber framework is designed in squares, four quadrants of a circle being placed back to back within each square,

<sup>1</sup> Vol. III, p. 81.

the total effect being a pattern of intersecting squares and circles. The grouping of roofs and crow-stepped chimneys in this building is very picturesque."

To this may be added that the peculiar features of the timber framing are exactly paralleled at Burningfold, an interesting sixteenth-century house in Dunsfold parish, illustrated in a short paper on this house which I wrote for Vol. XXIII of *S.A.C.*, in connection with the visit paid thereto by this Society in July 1909. The illustrations include a photograph of a square newel-staircase, the newel being a great circular trunk or mast, from which as a centre radiate the solid slabs of oak treads, 3 inches thick, all stop-chamfered, and each tread being what carpenters call a "winder." This, then, is another of the group of wooden newel stairs, all "winders": and a fifth may be added to the list, although only the stump of the newel and one or two "winders" remain underneath a later staircase of the ordinary type, in the old house at Banstead on the eastern side of the County, on which I contributed a paper to Vol. XXXIII of these *Collections*.<sup>1</sup> If we travel across the Sussex border to Lynchmere, not far from Rake and Shottermill, we shall find yet another in the old house known as "Bridge," of early sixteenth and early seventeenth-century dates, of which I published a paper in Vol. LIV of the *Sussex Archæological Collections*. This house, by the way, was shown to have been enlarged in 1631 by Roger Shotter, whose family gave the name to our Shottermill in Surrey. These honest yeomen, sheep-farmers, iron masters and squires of Surrey and Sussex, were closely connected in life and ideas: therefore it is not perhaps surprising that this square newel-stair, replacing the primitive ladder-stair, and antedating for the most part the more modern type of staircase, in open flights, with landings, should have spread from one to another of their timber-framed houses. Probably other examples still survive in the district of south-west Surrey and the Sussex borderland, but as far as I know the fashion did not spread into Kent, nor have I met with it further afield.

<sup>1</sup> The photographic illustration therein gives an excellent idea of the construction at Burningfold and elsewhere.

The Bramley house, like so many of these old Surrey timber houses, represents a growth, and its building occupied over a century. The long South front appears to be the original building, and to have been erected in the latter years of Henry VIII's reign, say about 1545; whereas the long right-angle extension on the West side was evidently built in about 1580, the staircase wing being added at the same time. There are other developments which cannot be intelligibly explained without a plan.

The extensive remains of mural painting recently brought to light occur almost entirely on the walls and partitions of the older part, on ground and first floors, and appear to be coeval with the extension of *c.* 1580—not with the original building.

The designs are varied, consisting of graceful floral patterns, not unlike bold wall-paper designs, with a good deal of blue-green foliage, more or less conventional. One pattern, in maroon-chocolate on amber in an upper storey bed-chamber, chiefly over the fireplace, is of a characteristic Tudor-Elizabethan arabesque design. An interesting feature, when I saw the paintings partially uncovered, was the occurrence of texts in "black-letter" (literally blue-black letters on a greyish ground), which were not decipherable, save for a word here and there, as here set down: . . . *ty moft n . . . before.* A patient palæographer's holiday-task awaits him here. Unfortunately a long strip of the decoration on the upper floor is cut into by a modern partition: and on the occasion of my visit in January much of the painting—it appears to be all in *tempera*—was still covered with many coats of whitewash. A very interesting point is that part of the work is not upon the plaster of the older wall, but on coarse linen or canvas, stretched and nailed with broad-headed nails to the wall-surface, this covering both the constructional timbers and the interspaces of surface-plastered wattle and daub.

This at once recalled to me the similar method of execution at the sixteenth-century timber-framed house, Pokes, Chiddingly, Sussex, with the discovery and preservation of which I was concerned in 1909-10, and of which I have given an illustrated account in the *Sussex Archæological*

*Collections.*<sup>1</sup> In this account I was able to date the paintings at approximately 1572 to 1580, which, as will be seen, is the same general date of 1580 to which I have assigned the paintings at Bramley. At Pokes also there were found amid the floral decoration oblong panels, bordered with geometrical ornaments, on which were inscribed in the same black-letter as at Bramley—*i.e.*, in white letters on a grey or green ground—verses of the doggerel piety that was evidently popular with the Puritan gentry of that period, as thus:

In lyfe there ys no fure staye  
for fleashe as flower dothe vade<sup>2</sup> awaye  
this carcas made of slyme and claye  
muste taste of deathe thear ys no way  
while we have tyme then let vs praye  
to god for grace bothe nighte and daye

and

Beholde the ende ere thou begynne  
Have minde of deathe and fear to sinne  
For deathe shall ceare<sup>3</sup> that lyfe hath sowne  
And lyfe shall springe wheare death hath mowne  
Give grace thearfore O god moste hye  
That we in Christe may lyve and dye.

It will be interesting, when the Bramley texts can be deciphered, to see whether they were taken from the same copy-book of somewhat gloomy moral sentiments that furnished the Chiddingly painter with his "copy."

In writing of the latter I suggested that "the scheme of colour was executed by a travelling artist, who doubtless found plenty to do in journeying from one house to another of the gentry and yeomanry, who, during the sixteenth century, had grown into such a numerous class in Surrey and Sussex. At Scarlett's Mill, a late sixteenth-century house of this class in Cowden parish, Kent, close to the Sussex border (about 18 miles due north of Chiddingly), are to be seen painted verses and decoration of very similar character, with the date 1597." The White House, Balcombe, Sussex,

<sup>1</sup> Vol. LIII, p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> *fade*. Was the limner of Somerset or Dorset (?)

<sup>3</sup> *i.e.*, wither, or blast.

the old Rectory at Cocking, Sussex (now pulled down), and houses in South Harting, also in the N.W. of that county, preserve similar black-letter texts and decorations of the latter part of the sixteenth century: and other texts, mostly later, have been found, carved, at Standard Hill, a fine old farmhouse in Ninfield parish, and at Hangleton House, Sussex.

We of the Surrey Archæological Society must congratulate Mr. and Mrs. Van Lessen and their architect on the discovery and preservation of these precious fragments of domestic art of the Elizabethan period: and also upon the careful and tasteful nature of the repair and adaptation of their beautiful old house. Such things are a possession of national importance.