

VERNON HOUSE, FARNHAM, SURREY.

BY

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FEW houses in Farnham are better known than Vernon House. Farnham is proud of it, partly for its old-world quaintness, and partly for its connection with Charles I. Yet, curiously enough, no purely local tradition seems to have survived the unhappy monarch's brief visit, and all record of it has to be gleaned from outside sources. The room where he slept, and the nightcap he gave to his blind host, Harry Vernon, are still to be seen—at least by some.

On the bleak December night he found shelter within its walls, Mr. Herbert in his memoirs says the King chatted with the Parliament's General, Harrison, in a window-bay of the panelled parlour; but the King received little assurance or comfort from the conversation, and, curiously enough, the General was one of those who signed his death-warrant—a fact which the King surmised on that evening he first met him, and which made him shrink from his company.

The panelling of the parlour is no longer visible, but in a bedroom in the west wing of the present house there are several sections of oak panelling of the Tudor period, very roughly put up and cut to block a window, while the whole of one side of the room is sheeted in very inferior panelling of a much later period, and not of oak.

While some renovating of this panelling was in hand in 1926, the present owner of the house saw through a split in the oak panelling near the fireplace something on the wall that looked like mural decoration. On removing the section the beautiful Renaissance work shown in the accom-

panying illustration (Plate I) came to light. The tempera work is in the usual black, red, and ochre, and is unfortunately damaged, part of it evidently before the panelling was erected, either by smoke or damp, but a large portion fortunately remains and reveals the work of a skilled artist.

The idea is to suggest an overmantel in Classical style, carved in wood or stone, with outstanding columns supporting a shelf with two cupboard-like boxes, one on either end of the shelf, and in the space between a frieze, in the centre of which is a coat of arms on a sixteenth-century shield, supported on either side by curious monsters with human faces in the deadly lock of serpents. On the doors of the cupboard are crests—the decipherable one of which is a horse's head “party argent and gules” on a wreath argent and sable. The coat of arms is that of the diocese of Winchester impaling three bugle horns—the arms of Bishop Horne, Bishop of Winchester 1561–1580 (Fig. 2).

A strip of diaper work runs below; beneath this again a four-lined *poetical* inscription, below which comes the motto:

“Sarve God all thy lyfe longe.”

The rhymed inscription reads:

“Give thanks to God for all his gyftes, Showe not thyself unkinde and suffer not his benefytes to slip out of thy mind that did redeme thy lyfe from death from which thou could'st not flee. His mercy and compassion both He dide extend to thee The Lorde is kinde and merciful when sinners do him greve the slowest to conceeve a wrath and rediest to forgive And looke what pity parents unto their children beare, lyke pity beareth the Lorde such as worship him in feare.”

The coat of arms gives us the approximate date of the work. The crest I have been unable to connect with the usual crest of the Horne family as displayed on the shield, but perhaps it refers to the tenant of the house at the date the painting was executed.

The poetry, the motto, and the queer human-faced monsters in the snakes' stranglehold all seem to imply that the designer meant to refer to some narrow escape of death experienced by the person for whom the painting was

erected, and the fear lest prosperity and time should weaken the consciousness of God's benefits and gifts, and the failure to use those gifts as generously as the God who bestowed them. It may be that some reader will be able to connect this piece of biographical experience with some actual person who inhabited the house, or paid for its decoration.

It was Bishop Horne who in 1566 renewed Farnham's charter. Possibly he used Culver Hall as a place in which to hold his Manor Court. Bishop Horne was Dean of Durham in 1561, and, being a Puritan zealot and a disputer with the Roman Catholic divines, destroyed with his own hands the Shrine of St. Cuthbert in Durham Cathedral, denouncing the adoration paid to the saint's relics. On the accession of Queen Mary he was naturally a marked man, and fled to Zurich for safety. Possibly the symbolism of the serpent and monsters, the poetry and the motto refer to some remarkable escape he experienced in this flight, and which, on being appointed to the see of Winchester after Queen Mary's death, he desired to keep fresh in memory and inspire his generosity.

The house is said to have been known, prior to the coming of the Vernons to live in it, as "CULVER HALL." The word "culver," denoting a dove or pigeon, occurs in several place-names in the Manor of Farnham—Culverlands and Culverwell.

A possible explanation—which, however, I have been unable as yet to support by evidence—is that the house was the Bishop of Winchester's Warden of his Forests and Chases place of residence, and that the dovecotes, which alone a lord of a manor could erect, were adjacent to the Warden's lodge and under his supervision.

Bishop Morley later on appointed George Vernon to the office of Warden for life, and possibly the Vernons *may* have eventually purchased the house for themselves. The Tudor front has been obscured by a recasing some 100 years ago.

There are many interesting features in this old Tudor house which has gone through many vicissitudes—the handsome lead cistern in the stable yard (Plate II); the Jacobean staircase in the East wing; the mechanically self-



PANELLED ROOM IN VERNON HOUSE, FARNHAM.



VERNON HOUSE, FARNHAM.
LEAD CISTERN IN STABLE YARD.

opening door in the passage leading to the kitchen; the chamber in which King Charles slept; the dated and inscribed bricks in the stable yard from Dippenhall brickworks; the Cedar in the garden, given to the Vernons by Mrs. Brownlow North about 1820 when she was planting the cedars on the Castle lawn, which now have grown such large trees that their picturesqueness has to be paid for by the darkening of some of the Castle apartments, and which visitors think are a great deal older than they really are.

I am indebted to Mr. Humphry Joel, of Radlett, for the excellent photographs which illustrate this article.