

18TH-CENTURY FLOCK WALLPAPER AT CLANDON PARK, NEAR GUILDFORD

BY

E. A. ENTWISLE

WALLPAPER is essentially an ephemeral commodity, and early examples are more often to be found in fragmentary form in museums than in the natural setting of the home. It is therefore a matter of some interest to record the existence of an 18th-century wallpaper which, so far as can be ascertained, has remained *in situ* since the date it was first hung on the walls, over one hundred and seventy years ago.

Though, owing to the absence of documentary evidence, it is difficult today to establish with certainty the name of the maker or the date it was manufactured, the fact remains that the flock wallpaper which graces the Ball Room (once known as the Palladio Room) at Clandon Park, the seat of the Earl of Onslow, near Guildford, is one of the most interesting that has come to the notice of wallpaper experts in recent years: a fact which did not escape the practised eye of the late H. Avray Tipping some years ago,¹ though even he was unable to say more about it than that "the chymney piece, mirrors and the wallpaper in this room were all put up *about 1776*."

In the decoration of most rooms the wall hangings, of whatever type they may be, are in the main no more than a contributory part of the scheme as a whole—a background giving tone to the other furnishings—but in this case the wallpaper (which covers all four walls from dado rail to cornice) dominates the room on account of its rich colours and beauty of design, and this in spite of the fact that the room is elaborately ornamented with gilt detail in the Adam style.

As will be seen from a reference to Plate VIII, its design is of classic inspiration, typical in fact of the work of French wallpaper makers at the end of the 18th century, while the sensitive interpretation of the design—in such a difficult medium as flock—indicates that this wallpaper was produced by exceptionally skilled and experienced craftsmen.

The first French wallpaper maker of note that springs to the mind is the great Réveillon of Paris, who worked very successfully in flock during the latter part of the 18th century; and there is

¹ "Clandon Park," by H. Avray Tipping, *Country Life*, September, 1927.

reason to suppose that Réveillon—the doyen of “tontissiers” (makers of flock papers)—at least inspired the design of the Clandon Park paper, if he did not actually print it.

Wallpaper making, or paper-staining, was a flourishing industry, both in England and France, at the time this flock paper was hung at Clandon Park (1776). Not only were there many different methods of production, but there was also a wealth of traditional design on which to draw, notably among the velvet and silk hangings and printed textiles which had always found favour as wall coverings both here and on the Continent.

The most successful and perhaps the most handsome wallpapers were the flock papers which so perfectly resembled the Italian cut velvet hangings with their broad foliated leaf and pomegranate motifs.

But occasionally the medium of flock was employed in the production of wallpapers whose designs were less traditional and more expressive of the taste of the day. Réveillon, for example, took a new line by employing the best of the artists who had previously been engaged in painting decorations on wood panelling, the result of which was that wallpaper eventually took the place of this costly method of interior decoration.

Flocking on cloth was well understood and freely used in medieval times to make coarse cloth look finer, but flocking on paper was a later development dependent upon the supply of good-quality paper stout enough to withstand the process.

The methods used in making flock papers at this time were basically very little different from what they are today. The paper was first “grounded,” or laid with colour (the Clandon Park paper originally had a brilliant sky-blue ground, which will be referred to later); the design was then printed on the ground with a slow-drying adhesive by means of wood blocks. The composition of the adhesive varied, but a hundred years ago a composition of boiled oil and japan size was used.¹

Next the printed paper was drawn over, or through, a box filled with wool or silk shearings of the desired colour, the sides of the box being beaten with a cane to cause the flock to fly on to the adhesive. Finally, the surplus was carefully brushed off and the paper pressed or rolled in order to make the flock adhere more closely.

In special cases it was common practice to repeat this process with additional applications of flock (or even colour for outlines, fine veining or high lights), thus building up the depth of the flock and generally enriching the effect.

The flock paper at Clandon Park appears to have been subjected to the latter process and the work has been done very skilfully.

At this date (1776) paper was supplied to the paper-stainer in the form of small sheets which had to be joined together before

¹ *Magazine of Science*, 1845.

printing. The Clandon Park paper is composed of sheets each measuring $17\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by 22 inches wide, joined together and backed with cartridge or other strong paper. (The joins are visible in the illustration, Plate VIII.) The design has a large vertical repeat of 48 inches. The colours, which it is impossible to enumerate exactly, vary from rich crimsons and greens (flowers and drapes) to soft browns and greys (flowers, birds and foliage).

The distempered ground referred to above as originally being sky blue is powdered with a tiny grey flock spot, but the ground has now faded to a whitish grey, which varies in tone from sheet to sheet.

There are at least two variants of this flock paper in existence today, one of which is in the Victoria and Albert Museum collection, described as English manufacture, late 18th century; the other, which is attributed to Réveillon, is illustrated in Clouzot and Follot's book¹ published in Paris in 1935. This paper, which is said to have been printed about 1785, is here given the title "Les Deux Pigeons," obviously suggested by the two birds which figure so prominently in the design.

It will be seen that the design of the former (Plate IX) has been printed in reverse to that at Clandon Park and that some of the motifs used in each differ one from the other. The English example is, in fact, inferior in many respects to the Clandon Park paper and also to the Réveillon version, and the assumption is that an English paper-stainer at some time or other took a rough tracing or rubbing of the original and did the best he could to reproduce it. Comparing Plate VIII with Plate IX, it will be noticed that the graceful drawing of the bird in flight, which is such a striking feature in the Clandon Park paper, is entirely lacking in the English specimen, while the addition of the corn stalks on either side of the design which occurs in the Museum example (and which is also a feature of the Réveillon design, not illustrated) is missing from the Clandon Park paper.

The dimensions of the sheets of which the Victoria and Albert example are comprised vary very little, however, from those of the Clandon Park paper, though both colours and technique are different.

Miss Nancy McClelland in her book *Historic Wallpapers* (1924) gives full details of Réveillon's career from his modest beginning as a stationer in Paris in 1752 to his retirement in 1792; and Clouzot and Follot in their book referred to above reproduce in colour a flock paper printed in 1785 bearing the mark "Manufacture Royale de Réveillon," the design of which is composed of hanging baskets of flowers on a crimson ground.

It is apparent from Clouzot and Follot's account that Réveillon quite early saw the possibilities of flocking, and that largely by his own business acumen and artistic flair became in time the

¹ Clouzot and Follot, *Histoire du Papier Peint en France*, Paris, 1935.

This image has been deleted owing
to copyright restrictions

PLATE IX.—FLOCK WALLPAPER. ENGLISH, LATE
18TH CENTURY. (VICTORIA AND ALBERT
MUSEUM.)

See page 58.

greatest wallpaper maker of his day, not only in France but in the world. The insight which led him, in the first instance, to employ only the finest artists undoubtedly had much to do with his success in this sphere.

The Réveillon paper shows a delicacy of touch even more exquisite than the one at Clandon Park, and there seems little doubt that if it were possible to place side by side for examination the three papers—all of which at first sight seem so very similar—it would be agreed that the wallpaper attributed to Réveillon contains the finest workmanship.

It is disappointing to be unable to identify the Clandon Park flock paper more exactly—this is impossible without separating the paper from its backing—but it is something to have linked it so closely with one of the most outstanding figures in the history of wallpaper making.

To offset this disappointment is the happy circumstance of the survival *in situ* of this fine example of old wallpaper, an article, which unlike pictures or furniture, was rarely inventoried or remarked upon, and more often than not was removed from the wall piecemeal and destroyed as soon as it became faded or shabby.

The writer would like to express his thanks to the Earl of Onslow for his kind permission to publish this account of the wallpaper, and also to Sir Hilary Jenkinson for drawing attention to it.

This image has been deleted owing
to copyright restrictions

PLATE VIII.—FLOCK WALLPAPER AT CLANDON PARK.

See page 58.