

Borelli House, 35–36 The Borough, Farnham: a note on various aspects of a 17th-century town house

Introduction (MR)

During refurbishment of part of the ground floor area of the above property fronting The Borough, timber framing of this building and 37 The Borough to the west was exposed. The adjoining walls of these two properties were recorded. Traces of painting on plaster and some of the structural timbers of the western wall of 35–36 The Borough were also found. A reconstruction of these painted designs has been attempted and is presented here.

35–36 The Borough appears to have been built around 1600, at a time when a considerable number of properties in Farnham were being rebuilt or refurbished. Although not conclusive evidence for the date of construction, a date plate of 1610 still exists under the covered passageway of the property. The building was originally L-shaped in plan, with a jettied first floor overlooking The Borough. Later in the 17th century buildings were added at the back, while the front was subsequently altered in the 18th century. 37 The Borough is also dated to the 17th century, but examination of the adjoining walls indicates that 35–36 is the elder of the two properties.

The original infill between the studs of the western wall frame of 35–36 was wattle and daub. This material was later removed and replaced with laths, which were nailed to the studs and covered by plaster containing horse or cow hair. It was at this stage that the wall was painted. To the south of the third principal post, 4.7m from the street front, the wall was covered by framed chamfer and ovolo moulded oak panelling, joined together by dowelling pegs. This panelling also appears to be 17th century in date. The difference in wall coverings and the mortice holes in the post that divides them clearly indicate the existence of a partition at this point (fig 1).

Unfortunately, no documentary evidence is available to suggest the various functions that this building may have filled in the 17th century. However, the presence of the wall paintings suggests that the western side of the building fronting The Borough may have been a reception area – the hall, rather than a shop. It is not absolutely clear whether the hall occupied the entire front of the property, or, as seems more likely, was partitioned, probably for a shop to the east. The oak-panelled room at the back of the hall probably served as a parlour, with more private chambers above stairs. In the 18th century The Borough rentals suggest that this property could have been the King's Arms Inn, although the evidence for this is not entirely conclusive (Peggy Parks, pers comm).

The wall painting (JS)

As the lath and plaster had been removed, all that remained of the painting *in situ* were traces of patterning on the beams and the central post. Although fragmentary, these traces revealed the painting to be a coloured design of imitation panelling with a repeated floral pattern and a decorated surround. The designs were painted freehand using distemper. This type of wall decoration, as classified by Reader (1941, 202–11), usually consisted of a frieze, middle and dado or skirting. Damage to the central post meant that it was only possible to attempt a reconstruction of the middle section (fig 1).

As the painting covered the whole wall, a thin coat of white plaster had first been applied to the timbers and plaster infill. A sharp edge to a section of painting on the southern central beam suggests a piece of cloth had been used to cover an awkward join with the lath and plaster. The painting was very faded, but the colour scheme seems to have been white, black, yellow, light red-brown, red-brown and green (now faded to blue-green). The floral pattern (fig 2) was composed of stylized flowers and leaves, possibly acanthus, painted variously green and red-brown on to a white ground and outlined in black. However, it is possible that the leaves were consistently

coloured green. The roundel at the centre of the pattern was consistently red-brown with a black outline and decorated, probably as imitation wood-grain. The surround was also red-brown and patterned with interlacing curves and dashes in yellow. The frame was a light red-brown, outlined in black. Its comparative lightness contrasted with the surround would have probably created the illusion of depth. From the surviving fragments it seems that the different coloured panels did not form an obvious pattern (fig 1), but it is probable that they were arranged in an overall scheme.

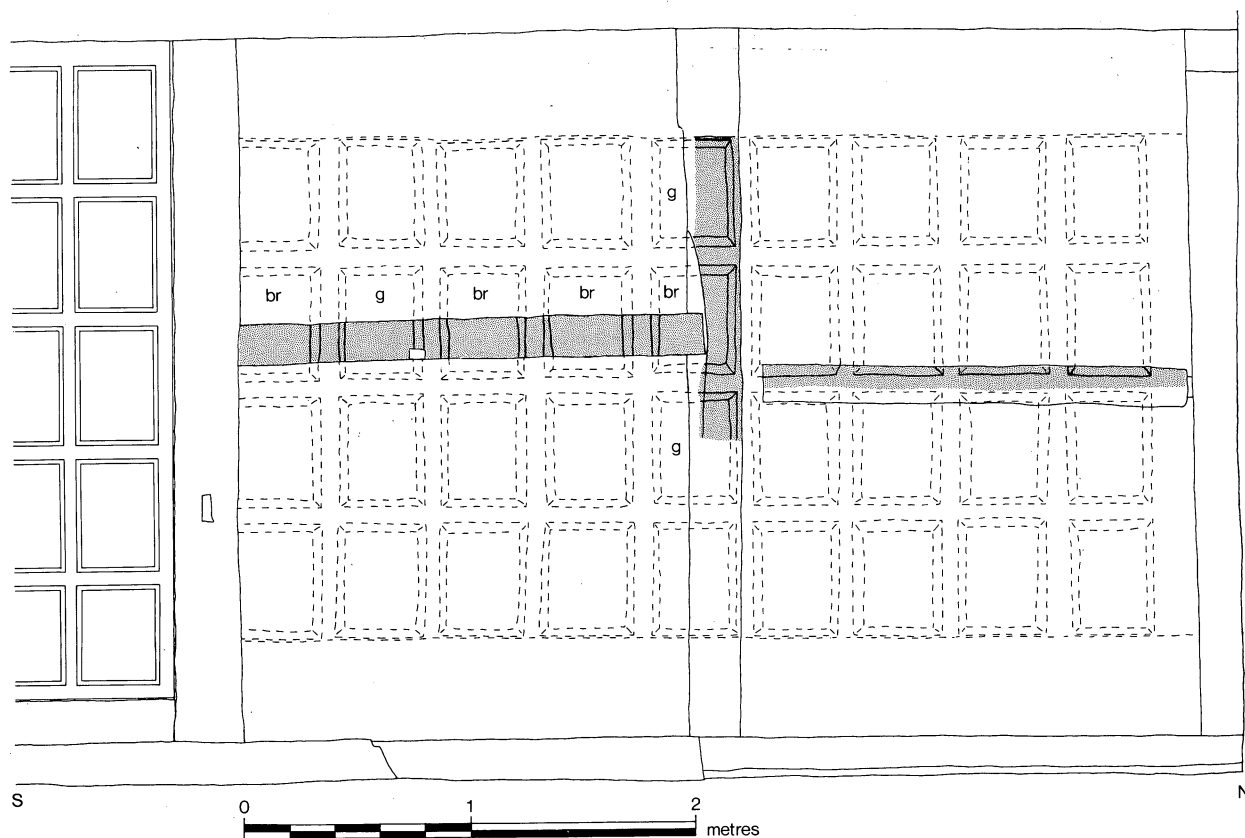
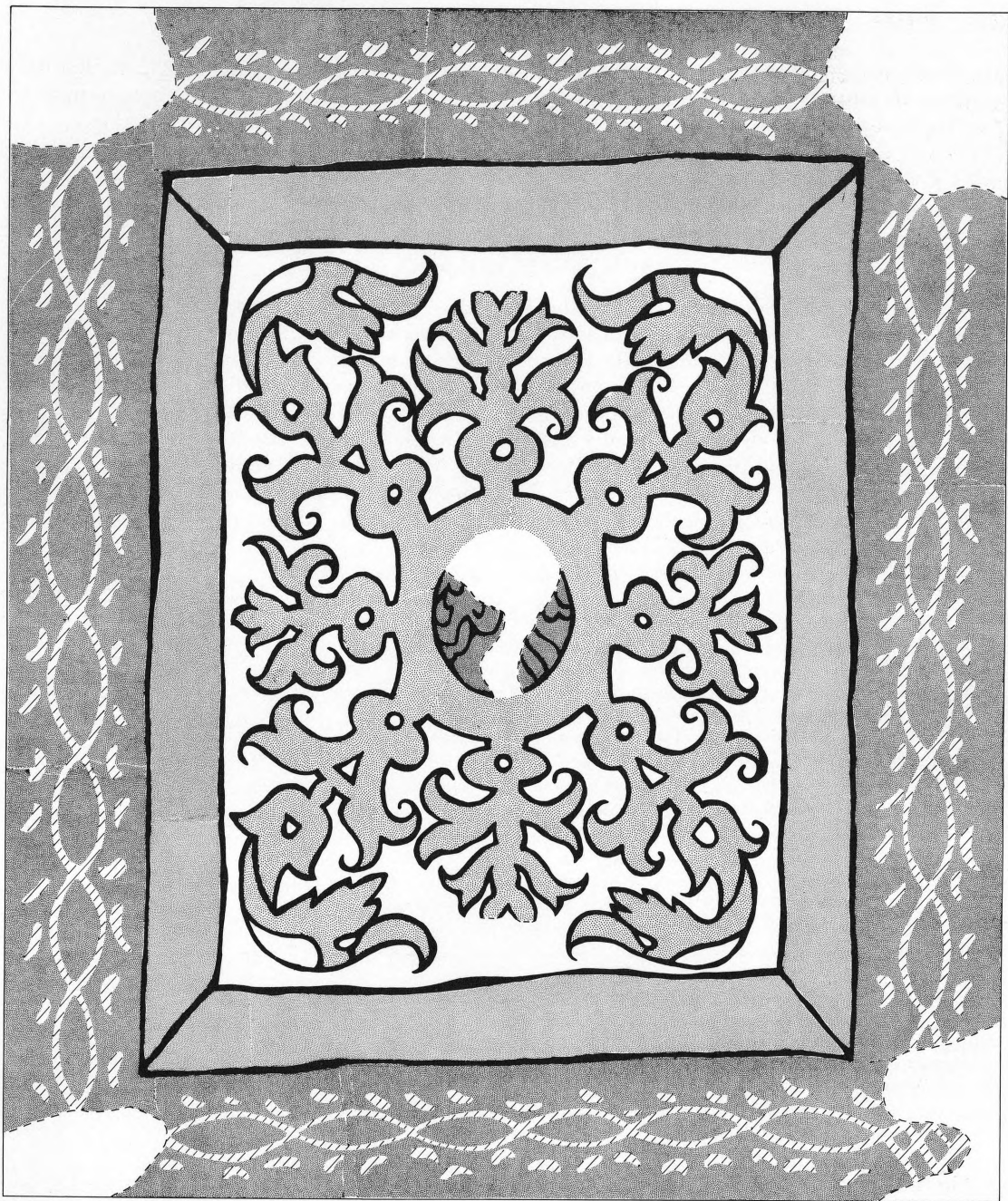


Fig 1. Traces of painting indicated on principal timbers, with reconstruction of imitation panelling, showing the arrangement of green (g) and red-brown (br) panels. The oak panelling is also shown. The street front – The Borough – is immediately to the north of the building. (Drawn by J Smith)

The floral pattern, which was probably originally derived from Renaissance ornament, is similar in style to wall paintings found at Alfriston, Sussex (Godfrey 1939, 219), and South Harting, Sussex (Johnston 1932, 81), although their designs were not surrounded by imitation panels. A comparable example of a pattern contained within a panel was recorded at Rochester, Kent (Wheatley 1929, 135). Like the design from 35–36 The Borough it has an affinity with a type of 15th-century Italian book design (Hind 1935, 75).

Imitation panelling with patterning was one of the popular types of wall decoration in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. The design of the wall painting at 35–36 The Borough and the replacement of the original wattle and daub by lath and plaster, suggest that this refurbishment and the paintings were both carried out in the first quarter of the 17th century. No other contemporary examples of wall paintings have been recorded in Farnham. The manner in which



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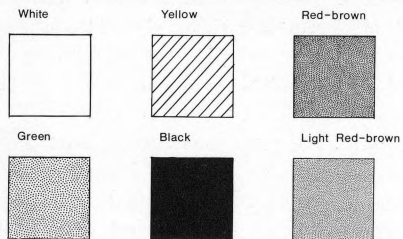


Fig 2. Reconstruction of a single panel with green floral decoration and border. Areas shown by broken line indicate where reconstruction was not possible. (Drawn by J Smith)

the designs were painted suggests the painting was probably the work of a local craftsman. For the purpose of comparison it is interesting to note the wooden panelling next to the painted imitation (fig 1).

The photographic record and measured drawings relating to this property and 37 The Borough and fragments of the painted plaster have been deposited in Farnham Museum.

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