

Notes on Painted and Plaster Ceilings in Derby.

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WITH a view to preserve sketches and notes of painted and plaster ceilings in houses, which, some years ago, were the town residences of the gentry and merchants of former times, whose descendants have now migrated entirely into the country, and with which relics of a former period of house decoration the hand of the "restorer," or the requirements of business are making such rapid inroads upon, these notes are penned; and also in the hope that other readers will be incited to look around, and make notes of similar objects of interest with which they may be acquainted.

PLASTER CEILING.

The first ceiling we allude to is opposite the Town Hall, in a house in the Market Place, Derby, and now in the occupation of Mr. Hall. This room formerly measured 38 by 16 feet, but is now divided into two rooms. Two, out of the five, panels, which formed the ceiling of the larger room, have been destroyed. The room now only measures 22ft. 6in. \times 16ft., in consequence of the house having been made into two. In its original state, the room had a fire-place at each end. The walls are of oak wainscot, and there are still traces of rude carving, or scribing, now nearly obliterated by repeated coats of paint. It had five windows, looking on to the Market Place, with a seat in each; and when the ceiling was perfect, and most likely the plaster work coloured, it must have been a handsome room, and justly laid claim to the

historical title of "the great room in the Market Place." In each panel is a handsome design of scrolls and flowers in plaster, in bold relief. The design and the work are alike artistic.

The whole of the flowers and scrolls are evidently modelled by hand, and not moulded or cast in plaster, as no two scrolls or flowers are exactly alike. The shields at either end were most probably originally emblazoned with coats of arms.

The *Derby Mercury*, of April 3, 1872, speaking of the visit of the Pretender to Derby, says, "We have heard that the final Council was not held in the Exeter House, but in the spacious apartment, known as 'the great room in the Market Place,' then, we believe, the residence of Alderman Smith, upon whom 'Old Gordon, of Glenbucket,' was quartered. Our authority for this statement, is not, however, now at hand; and Mr. Cantrell's (the Rev. Henry Cantrell, Vicar of St. Alkmund's, Derby, 1712-1773) letter says nothing about the Councils of War. There are good substantial reasons, however, for believing that in this house another Charles—the martyred first of that name—slept when he visited Derby in 1635. On that occasion, according to the sarcastic Hutton, the Corporation of Derby gave the Duke of Newcastle a fat ox, a calf, six fat sheep, and a purse of gold, in order that he might 'Keep hospitality; that is, invite them to dinner.'"

PAINTED CEILINGS.

Two other ceilings, worthy of note, are of a different character, and are in the houses now occupied by Mr. Storer and Mr. Haskew, in the Market Place, Derby. The two houses were formerly one, which was the residence of Mr. Franceys, from whose family it passed, by purchase, to the Storers, over two hundred years ago. The two rooms in which the ceilings are, are to the front, and adjoin each other, with double doors communicating; the space between the latter is now bricked up. Both rooms are oak panelled; and the whole house bears evidence of the means and taste of its builder.

The two ceilings are painted in a bold style of some merit, but, having been "cleaned," the originals have been somewhat

impaired. The ceiling in Mr. Storer's house represents the gods in council. It is divided into two compartments; in the upper one, the gods are seated in Olympus—Jupiter, and his wife Juno, Venus, Diana, and a crowd of other deities and attendants. The deities have with them their emblems; as Jupiter, an eagle; Diana, rays of light; Juno, a peacock; Neptune, a trident: &c. In the lower compartment are other deities, as Hercules, Mercury, &c., while scattered over the ground are twenty-four winged figures, reported to represent the twenty-four hours of the day. The late Mr. Storer used to state that there are initials in a corner of the painting, but Mr. Chas. Storer, the present occupier and owner, has not been able to detect them. The whole tone of the painting is dark, and it shews best on a fall of snow, which reflects the light on it with excellent effect. The ceiling in the other room is painted by the same artist and has a similar subject.

At the back of the house there was formerly a large garden with a small fishpond, which was surrounded by gilt iron railings. Beyond this was a good sized summer-house, the ceiling of which was painted similar to the room ceilings. The summer-house was taken down to make way for business premises not more than about thirty years since.

This room has also connection with the same event of 1745, as we learn from Hutton, one of the historians of Derby, that "Lord Elcho had his lodgings at Mr. Storer's," and, as an instance that confidence may sometimes, at least, be placed in tradition, the following story well illustrates:—

"Some few years ago a Scotch gentleman called on the present occupant (Mr. C. J. Storer) and apologising for his being a stranger thus addressing him, said he had travelled a long way to verify, or otherwise, a tradition they had in their family, viz.: On the return of one of his ancestors to Scotland, with the army of Prince Charles Edward, he reported that he was quartered in a house in Derby, in which there was a very fine painted ceiling, belonging to a Mr. Storer. His descendant had determined on his first visit to England, to go on to Derby, and see if there was any truth in the tradition. On being shewn the ceiling, which tallied

with the description handed down, it is needless to say he was amply repaid for his journey."

The *Mercury* of April 3, 1872, also alludes to these ceilings. "Mr. Storer will forgive us for calling attention to the fact that his house in the Corn Market (whose painted ceilings may vie with those of Chatsworth) once rendered accommodation to the ladies who followed the fortune of 'Prince Charlie.' Here stayed Lady Ogilvie, Mrs. Murray, and others, who enjoyed themselves right loyally during the campaign, and were at last taken prisoners in their ball dresses, after the battle of Culloden, as they were proceeding to celebrate the defeat of the Duke upon the false intelligence brought in by a spy."

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