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WELBECK ABBEY, THE SEAT OF HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF PORTLAND.

The "Green Dale Cabinet" at Welbeck,
 AND THE
 "Green Dale Oak" from which it was made.

BY LLEWELLYNN JEWITT, F.S.A., &C., &C.

IT is not my intention in the present paper to enter at length into any particulars of the history of the Old Abbey of Welbeck, much less to attempt a description of the magnificent, and in many ways remarkable—indeed unique—mansion by which it has been succeeded, and which has not only been raised upon, but in great measure formed beneath, its site. This I have, to some extent, already done in my "Stately Homes of England," and I purpose, therefore, on the present occasion, to confine myself to a few observations upon a remarkable piece of furniture therein preserved, and the grand old tree—the "Green Dale Oak"—from the heart of whose trunk it was formed.

It may, however, be well, in few words, to say that Welbeck was, before the Conquest, held by the Saxon, Sweyn, but, later on, passed, as part of the manor of Cuckney, to the Flemangs; the Abbey being founded by Thomas de Cuckney, grandson of Jocus de Flemang, or Flemyng, in 1153, who colonised it with a party of canons from Newhouse, in Lincolnshire, the first house of the Premonstratensians in England. Welbeck was dedicated to St. James, and endowed with grants of land, which from time

to time were greatly augmented. In 1329, it is stated, "The Bishop of Ely bought the whole manor of Cuckney, and settled it upon the Abbey, on condition of their finding eight canons, who should enjoy the good things and pray for Edward the Third and his Queen, their children and ancestors, &c. ; also for the bishop's father and mother, brethren, &c. ; but especially for the health of the said lord bishop while he lived, and after his death, for his soul ; and for all theirs that had faithfully served him, or done him any good ;" to which was added this extraordinary injunction, "That they should observe his anniversary, and on their days of commemorating the dead, 'should absolve his soul by name,' a process whose frequent repetition might naturally be considered as needless, unless the pious bishop supposed that he might perhaps commit a few additional sins whilst in purgatory."

In 1512, Welbeck was, it is said, made the chief house of the Order of Premonstratensians. At the dissolution it was granted to Richard Whalley, and later on passed to the Cavendishes, in the person of Sir Charles Cavendish, third son of Sir William Cavendish, by his wife, Elizabeth Hardwick, afterwards Countess of Shrewsbury, and founder of the noble house of Newcastle. From them it passed successively, by marriage, to the Holles (created Duke of Newcastle), Harleys (Earl of Oxford and Mortimer), and Bentincks, in the person of William, second Duke of Portland, who, by his marriage with Lady Margaret Cavendish Harley, acquired the estates of that illustrious family.

It is to the second of these alliances, that of the Lady Henrietta Cavendish Holles, with Edward Harley, second Earl of Oxford and Mortimer, founder of the "Harleian" Collection of MSS. (and later on advanced to the dignity of Duke of Newcastle), that the interest of the piece of furniture I am about to describe attaches itself.

The "Green Dale Oak," to which I have made allusion, is only one out of many remarkable and historical trees that give a character peculiarly its own to the broad domains of Welbeck. It is one of the best known and most famous of trees, and takes rank among the oldest and most venerable in existence. Venerable

for its antiquity, grand in its hoary age, and eminent above most in its picturesqueness and strikingly singular character, this "Monarch of the Forest"—the "Methusaleh of Trees," as it has not inaptly been called—still stands, a living relic of long-past ages, and surrounded with a halo of historic and traditionary interest. It stands, in all its "forest pride," a complete wreck of its former self, but finer than ever in its picturesque aspects, and grand and solemn as a ruin.

When Hayman Rooke, in 1790, wrote his "Description and Sketches of some Remarkable Oaks in the Park at Welbeck," he spoke of this as being "thought to be above seven hundred years old; and, from its appearance, there is every reason to suppose that it has attained that age at least," while Thoresby, in his "Thoroton," supposed it, when he wrote, to be upwards of 1,500 years old, thus making a difference of eight hundred years in the computations of contemporary authorities!

In Evelyn's time, it was 33 feet in circumference at the bottom, the breadth of the boughs was 88 feet, covering a space equal to 676 square feet. In 1776, on the plate that accompanied Dr. Hunter's edition of the "Sylva," the measurements are given as:—Diameter of trunk near the ground, 12 feet; diameter of trunk at the top of the arch, 11 feet; girth of ditto, 34 feet 10 inches; diameter of trunk at widest part above the top of the arch, 13 feet 3 inches; height of the tree from the ground to top of highest branch, 53 feet 6 inches; height of the archway, 10 feet 2 inches; width of archway, 6 feet 2 inches." Major Hayman Rooke, in 1790, gave the measurement as:—"The circumference of the trunk, above the arch, is 35 feet 3 inches; the height of the arch, 10 feet 3 inches; width about the middle, 6 feet 3 inches; height to the top branch, 54 feet."

The trunk of this gigantic tree having a century or two back become hollow with age, and so much decayed that large openings occurred in its sides, the opening was, in 1724, sufficiently enlarged by cutting away the decayed wood to allow a carriage of the ordinary size, both in height and width, or three horsemen riding abreast, to pass through it.

Through this opening, cut through the genuine "heart of oak" of the stem of the tree, one of the noble owners of Welbeck is said, with his bride, to have driven, or been driven in, a carriage drawn by six horses, on the occasion of his marriage.

It is also said that on several different later occasions, carriages have been driven through the rudely cut and arched opening, while equestrians by the hundred have ridden through it from side to side.



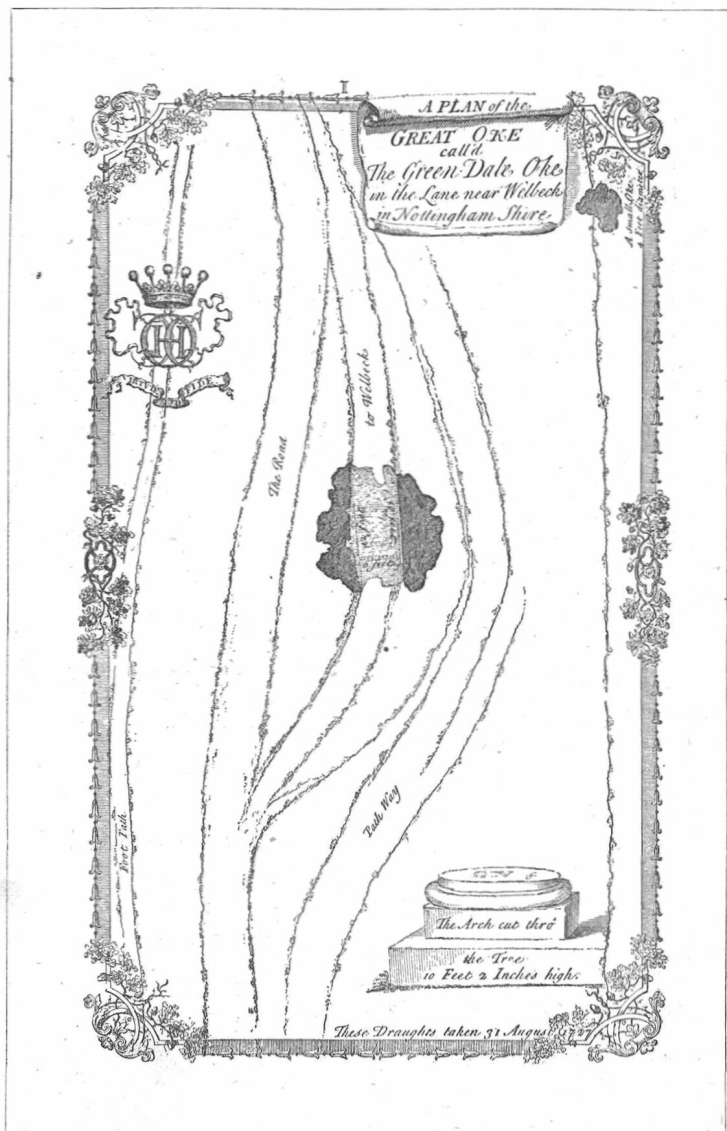
THE GREEN DALE OAK, IN THE PARK AT WELBECK.

The event to which I have alluded, of the carriage drawn by six horses, and driven by a cocked-hatted coachman on the box, having passed through the tree, is admirably represented on a fine old engraving, executed by George Vertue in 1727; and it is to

this, and the other engravings of the series, that I shall have to draw attention in reference to the cabinet upon which they are reproduced.

The engravings form a series of five folio plates, etched upon copper by George Vertue for the Countess of Oxford, to whom Welbeck belonged. They are of extreme interest, and of considerable rarity. I have myself, for the first time they have ever been re-produced, had them reduced by the never-failing photo-relief process from the prints themselves, so that they are literally line for line and touch for touch, the very etchings themselves as they left the engraver's hands more than a century and half ago; but of a reduced size; and I have great pleasure in thus adding them to my present paper.

The first plate of the series is a ground plan of that part of the Welbeck property where the Green-Dale Oak stands. In the centre is represented the ground plan of the tree in dark shade, with the opening in a lighter tint, and the dimensions marked thus—"12 feet," "10 feet," "6 feet;" and on the surrounding map, "Foot Path." "The Road" "to Welbeck" and "Path Way" are all accurately laid down and marked, as is also the situation of "A small Oke 4 Feet diameter," not far away. At the side of the plan are the monogram and coronet of the Countess (Henrietta Cavendish Holles, Countess of Oxford and Mortimer), and her motto, "*Virtue et Fide*;" at the top, on a roll, in six lines, the words, "A PLAN of the GREAT OKE call'd The Green Dale Oke in the Lane near Welbeck in Nottingham Shire;" and at the bottom, on the base of a pillar, "The Arch cut thro' the Tree 10 Feet 2 Inches high." "These Draughts taken 31 August 1727," and the initials *G.V.f.* of the engraver, George Vertue. The plan is enclosed in an ornamental border, with corner and other pieces composed of oak leaves and acorns. This highly interesting print I have had re-produced from the original plate in the manner I have before spoken of, and here introduce it on the next page.



FAC-SIMILE OF PLAN, AS ETCHED BY GEORGE VERTUE, IN 1727.

The second plate of the series, here re-produced, gives a side view of the tree (or rather of its trunk, for the branches are not

*Sæpe sub hâc Dryades festas duxere chorcas:
Sæpe etiam manibus nexis ex ordine, trunci
Circuere modam: mensurâq, reboris ulcas
Quinque ter implebat: nec non et cætera tanto
Silva sub hâc, sylvâ quanto jacet: herba, sub omni.
Ov. Met.*



The Green Dale Oaks near Willbeck, 1727.

shown) with railings and landscape at the back. Above it is the following quotation from Ovid:—

*“Sæpe sub hâc Dryades festas duxere chorcas:
Sæpe etiam manibus nexis ex ordine, trunci,*

*Circuere modum : mensuraque roboris ulnas
 Quinque ter implebat. Nec non et cætera tanto
 Silva sub hæc, sylvâ quanto jacet herba sub omni.
 Ov : Met :"*

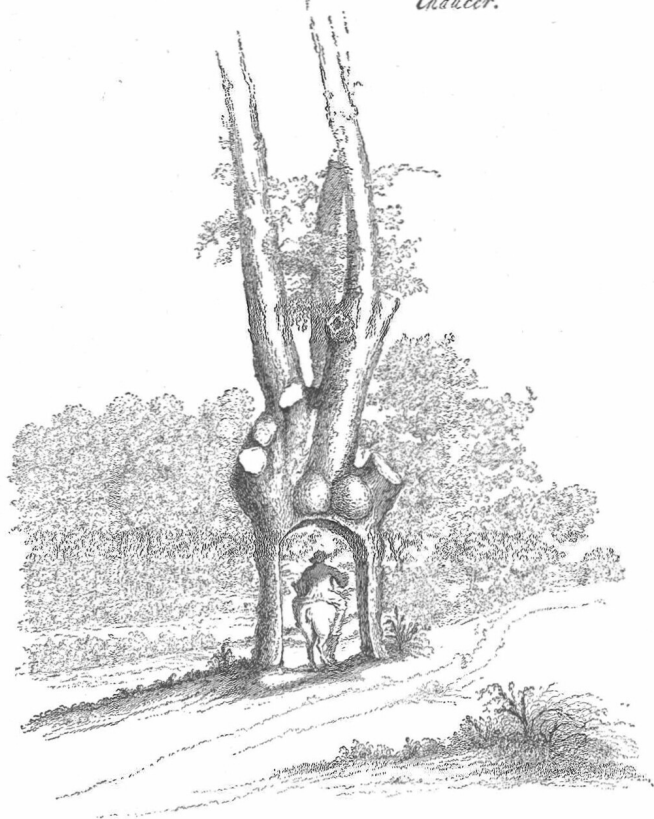
and at the bottom the words "*The Green-Dale Oak near Welbeck, 1727.*" The third of Vertue's engraved plates, here given in



reduced fac-simile, presents us with an angular view of the tree in its entirety, through the arched opening of which an equestrian is passing out towards the spectator. In the distance is the landscape with trees. At the top are Chaucer's words, "*Lo the Oke!*" and at the bottom, "*The Green Dale Oke near Welbeck, 1727.*"

The fourth of the series of these remarkable etchings represents

*Lo the Oke! that hath so long a norishing
 Fro the time that it gemmick first to spring
 And hath so long a life, as we may see;
 Yet at the laste, wastid is the Tree
 Chaucer.*



The Green-Dale Oke near Welbeck, 1727.

a front view of the tree from the opposite side, but, like the second of the series, leaving off the branches and the foliage. Through the artificial arched opening a man on horseback is exhibited as riding *from* the spectator towards the mass of forest trees forming the park scenery in the background of the picture. At the top of the plate are the following lines from Chaucer :—

*"Go the Oke ! that hath so long a norishing
Fro the time that it ginnith first to spring
And hath so long a life, as we may see ;
Yet at the laste, wastid is the Tree.*

Chaucer."

At the bottom are the words—" *The Green-Dale Oke near Welbeck, 1727.*"

The fifth and last of the series of etchings (which I give upon the next page) is, perhaps, the most interesting, giving, as it does, a picture of the entire tree with all its upper branches and foliage, through the arched opening in whose trunk a carriage—one of the lumbering vehicles of the period, with the tires of its massive and clumsy wheels, and the front of the carriage itself, studded with large nails—drawn by six horses, is being driven towards the spectator. Its noble driver (as I imagine him to be, to bear out the tradition) is seated on the box, with reins in his left, and whip in his right hand, and wears a cocked hat. On one of the leaders is a postilion, also furnished with a whip. In the background is park scenery with trees—one of them (that to the right) being evidently the "*small Oke 4 feet diameter*" marked upon the plan. At the top of the plate are the words "*Una Nemus,*" and at the bottom "*The Green-Dale Oke near Welbeck, 1727.*"

From wood cut out in forming the arched opening through the trunk of this wonderful tree, and from some of its branches, the "Green Dale Cabinet"—one of the treasured possessions of the Duke of Portland—at Welbeck, was made, as I have stated, for the then owner of the place, the Lady Henrietta Cavendish Holles, Countess of Oxford and Mortimer. Of it I give the accompanying

engraving (on page 44) from a drawing made by myself, with special permission of the Duke of Portland, and the following detailed

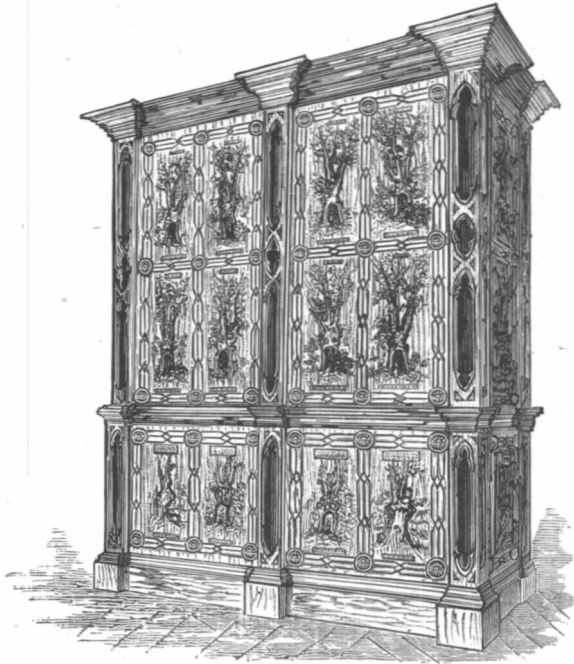
Una Nomus.



The Green Dale One near Wilberch, 1777.

description, which I had the pleasure of being the first to put on record. It appears to have been made in 1753, the name of the

workman being brought to light on the occasion of its being taken to pieces for removal a few years back. A copy of the writing has been kindly furnished to me, and is as follows :—"John Hocknell made this Librery Case September ye 2d 1753." The Countess of Oxford and Mortimer, for whom, as I have stated, it was made, died on the 9th of December, 1755, and was buried with her husband, who had pre-deceased her some years, in Westminster Abbey.



The cabinet, which is perfectly unique in style, character, and historic interest, and of paramount importance as connected with the history of one of the most remarkable of existing trees, measures seven feet six inches in height, six feet in width, and two feet two inches in depth, and is divided into two heights, each of which is furnished with a pair of folding doors. The upper

pair of these doors are each divided into four panels; the lower pair, each into two panels; and these are in each case separated from each other by inlaid bordering. The ends of the cabinet are each divided in a similar manner into three panels in height; two in the upper and one in the lower portion.

By the simple diagram here appended I have endeavoured to show the arrangement and character of these panels, and of the painted and inlaid designs—which in all cases are reproductions of Vertue's views—with which they are decorated. The designs

13	A 1 B	C 6 D	A 3 B	C 8 D	16
14	C 5 D	A 2 B	C 7 D	A 4 B	17
15	E 9 F	G 10 H	I 11 J	K 12 L	18

throughout, which are exquisitely inlaid and painted, and have a remarkably fine and good effect, are identical with the series of etchings which I have just described; the details of trees, lettering, etc., being strictly preserved.

In the upper of these doors, in each of the panels I have on this diagram marked 1, 2, 3, and 4, occur (thus four times repeated) the third of Vertue's etchings—the one engraved on page 40, with the horseman passing through the tree towards the spectator—with the words, "*Lo the Oke!*" at A, and "*The Green-Dale Oke, near Welbeck, 1727,*" at B, as there engraved.

In the panels which I have numbered 5, 6, 7, and 8, are the subject, thus again four times repeated, of Vertue's fifth plate of etchings—the one in which the carriage, drawn by six horses, is being driven through the tree, as engraved on page 43—similarly painted and inlaid; the driver and the postilion on the first horse being habited in red coats and cocked hats. Above each of these, at C, are the words "*Una Nemus*," and beneath each, at D, "*The Green-Dale Oke near Welbeck, 1727.*"

On the two of the panels of the lower pair of doors, upon which I have placed the numbers 9 and 12, occur the side view of the tree denuded of its top branches, as in Vertue's second plate, engraved on page 39 *ante*, with, at E and K, the quotation from Ovid, already given, and at F and L, the words "*The Green-Dale Oke near Welbeck, 1727.*" On each of the other two panels, which I have numbered 10 and 11, are Vertue's fourth subject—the one in which a man is represented riding from the spectator, through the arched opening in the tree stem, engraved on page 41 *ante*. Above each of these two, at G and I, is the quotation from Chaucer already given, and beneath each, at H and J, the usual words, "*The Green-Dale Oke near Welbeck, 1727.*"

The end of the Cabinet to the left has in its upper panel, which I have numbered 13, the same view of the tree, and the same lettering as already described on the panels 5, 6, 7, and 8 of the upper doors (engraved, page 43 *ante*); the middle panel, 14, the same as panels 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the doors (engraved on page 40 *ante*); and the lower panel, which I have numbered 15, bears the ground plan of that part of Welbeck Park where the Green Dale Oak stands, which forms the first of Vertue's series of etched plates, as already described and engraved on page 38 *ante*.

The opposite end of the cabinet, that to the right, is similarly divided into three panels in height, and bears, in like manner, in its upper panel, which I have numbered 16, the same view, with the horseman riding through the tree towards the spectators, as occurs on the panels 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the upper doors; the middle panel, 17, the same (the one with coach and six horses) as on panels

5, 6, 7, and 8 of the upper doors; and the lower one, 18, the ground plan, as on 15 on the other end, and engraved on page 38 *ante*.

It will have been gathered from the foregoing, that the "Green Dale Cabinet," of which I have had the pleasure of preparing and illustrating this notice, is a piece of historic furniture of no little value, and no trifling interest, and, with care, it will last long after the tree from which it was made has ceased to exist.

It may be interesting to note that, besides the series of etchings by George Vertue, done in 1727, other notable engravings of the tree have also been made. Among these are "*A North-West View of the Green Dale Oak near Welbeck*," drawn by S. H. Grimm, in 1775; engraved by A. Rooker; and "Published Jan. 21st, 1776, by A. Hunter, M.D., as the Act directs," to illustrate his quarto edition of Evelyn's "*Sylva*." This is a remarkably good and effective line engraving, in which a gentleman on horseback is represented as riding from the spectator through the archway in the trunk of the tree. Another quarto engraving for the same work, represents a north-east view of the same tree; and others give outlines and full dimensions at various points, referred to by letters. Another engraving, "Drawn by H. Rooke," "Engraved by W. Ellis," and "Published Dec. 31st, 1790," with the name of "*The Green-Dale Oak*," formed plate 5 of Hayman Rooke's "*Descriptions and Sketches of some Remarkable Oaks in the Park at Welbeck, in the County of Nottingham, a Seat of His Grace the Duke of Portland*. To which are added, Observations on the durability of the Tree, with Remarks on the Annual growth of the Acorn. London, 1790." In this plate, which is, like the rest of the series, poor and tame, a gentleman in a cocked hat is represented standing beneath the archway in the trunk of the tree with his walking-stick raised to touch the top of the opening. His accompanying description it is needless to quote. Several wood-cut representations of the tree have also at one time or other been given in various publications, and it is pleasant to add that in recent years, during the lifetime of the late Duke—to whose unbounded genius, engineering skill and constructive ability, as well as pure kindness of disposition, I desire

to bear emphatic record—a careful representation of the Green Dale Oak was, with other of the noted trees, designed to form the subject of sculpture in white marble, of one of the chimney pieces in the new part of the mansion.

The Green Dale Oak, as it now stands, propped, supported, chained, and lovingly preserved on all sides, is assuredly, while eminently picturesque in its every aspect, the grandest, most solemn looking, and venerable "wreck of ages" that any forest monarch—not even excepting the "Parliament Oak"—in appearance presents; but in spite of its hoary age, its desolateness of aspect, and its apparent decay, it still retains its vitality, and gives out year by year fresh foliage in its upper branches.

It is not, as Shakspeare has it, an "unwedgeable and gnarled oak"—"an oak, but with one green leaf upon it"—but an oak whose once "unwedgeable and gnarled" and knotty trunk and branches are now softened down, decayed, and rotted away into little better than "touch-wood," but yet with its hundreds of leaves, season after season springing into life, giving to its hoary and propped-up frame a crown of joy and beauty, with just here and there an acorn to give evidence that even in the last stages of decay its powers of vitality are not yet exhausted.

*The Hollies,
Duffield, Derby.*