

Chester Road immediately outside the presumed position of the east gate. The siting of the road does not therefore respect the later defences, and may have been related not to them but to the earlier military posts. Opportunity was taken of examining the ditch of the eastern defences. It measured about 17 ft. wide and at least 6 ft. deep at the point investigated. The ditch-diggers had evidently revetted the soft sand of the sides with clay to prevent collapse. The ditch had been left to fill up with rubbish, the final stages of its obliteration being dated by pottery in the upper filling to the later 4th century. The precise date at which the ditch was originally cut was not ascertained, but is likely to have been before the 4th century. Features antedating the defences, including a pit and traces of light timber structures dating from the Flavian and Antonine periods, were recorded and these should be regarded as part of the successive forts located in 1960. Among the more interesting small finds, there was recovered a number of samian vessels in a fabric which indicates an origin in Central Gaul before the major export period commenced, and, from the post-medieval levels, a large quantity of salt-glazed stoneware, much of it waster material, from Derby kilns.

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Later in the summer, Mr. Marjoram has reported that the Research Group carried out a separate excavation at Little Chester. A section, 65 ft. long, cut on the southern boundary of Darley playing fields, east of Stukeley's enclosure (35453260), revealed two Roman road surfaces, one about 11 ft. wide and the other a little wider. Between these roads were two ditches, one cutting the other. The earlier ditch was U-shaped, about 5 ft. wide and cut 2 ft. deep into the natural subsoil. The later ditch of a distinctly military V-shape was 9 ft. wide and 4 ft. below natural level. This most interesting section has raised questions which it is hoped further excavations may solve.

## A PAINTED ROOM IN ASHBOURNE

By KATHLEEN M. HOLLICK

**I**N January 1966, when Mr. Wood, occupier of 37 St. John Street, Ashbourne, was preparing a bedroom in his house for redecoration, he found that the walls were adorned with paintings. A darkened dado covered much of the lower part, the upper part being filled with pictures.

On one of the longer walls — the room measures 15 by 9 ft. — is a hunting scene. Across a landscape of fields and hedges streams the hunt with one lady rider. A grotto, a windmill and a church add interest to the landscape.

On the shorter wall containing the window, a woman in a poke bonnet takes a large dog for a walk along a waterside. A river with three small sailing-boats winds away into the distance. A classical temple-like building of the type sometimes seen in large gardens and parks laid out in the 18th

century and later is painted in such detail that a coat of arms on the pediment is possibly recognizable. It is depicted with some knowledge of heraldry and may have been copied, with the temple, from a picture or from some familiar building, as another, circular, temple may have been. This latter building may also be identifiable.

The longer wall containing the fireplace has a view of the east front of Kedleston Hall on the chimney breast, against an unexpected background of hills. Deer graze in the park and coursing is apparently in progress, although no hare is to be seen possibly because parts of this painting, unlike the greater part of the work, are in poor condition. Throughout there is an engaging disregard of scale and probability; temples arise in unlikely spots, and a large red and white shorthorn cow close to Kedleston Hall makes the nearby deer look like insects.

On the fourth wall, containing the door, a large castle beside the sea takes up the entire space, except for a few inches beyond the door, on which is compressed a thatched cottage with elegantly curved stone walls lining the path to the front door. Fanciful little churches occur at intervals, and small houses enliven otherwise dull corners and distances.

The painting is executed in tempera on plaster of exceptional quality and finish. The general feeling and style suggest a date around 1830, and the work is that of a self-taught country artist who might have painted inn-signs or local portraits. He has trouble with his perspective, and scale and proportion do not worry him, but his sky tones are fresh and delicate, and the larger trees have a kind of Richard Wilson flavour indicating some awareness of style. The temples are drawn with such precision and detail that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that they were copied from pictures in a book, but the large castle is a straggling, improbable looking building whose sole purpose seems to be to fill space.

It seems likely that these paintings are the work of a member of the Bassano family who were of Italian extraction and worked in Ashbourne as plasterers, gilders, painters and decorators throughout much of the 19th century and into the 20th. The oldest title deeds of no. 37 — formerly the Three Crowns Inn — dating from 1824 describe a workshop on the property and adjoining the house as “lately in the possession of Mark Anthony Bassano and Thomas Hurd”, though by 1831 Thomas Hurd was sharing it with a glazier named Pidcock. There was a painter’s workshop here up to about 1930, then occupied by Mr. J. Barker, whose trade sign-board over the street entry was surmounted by a gilded plaster lion, which may have been Bassano work and a relic of their former business. A Bassano worked in the town until the 1930s as a painter and decorator solely, having a reputation for great skill in his profession. For many years the walls of this room were covered by canvas, but this was removed about 1914, revealing the paintings which were then papered over. As the walls have again been papered, this account of the paintings is intended merely to record their existence and to suggest a possible origin.

I would like to express my gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Wood for kindly allowing me to see the paintings.