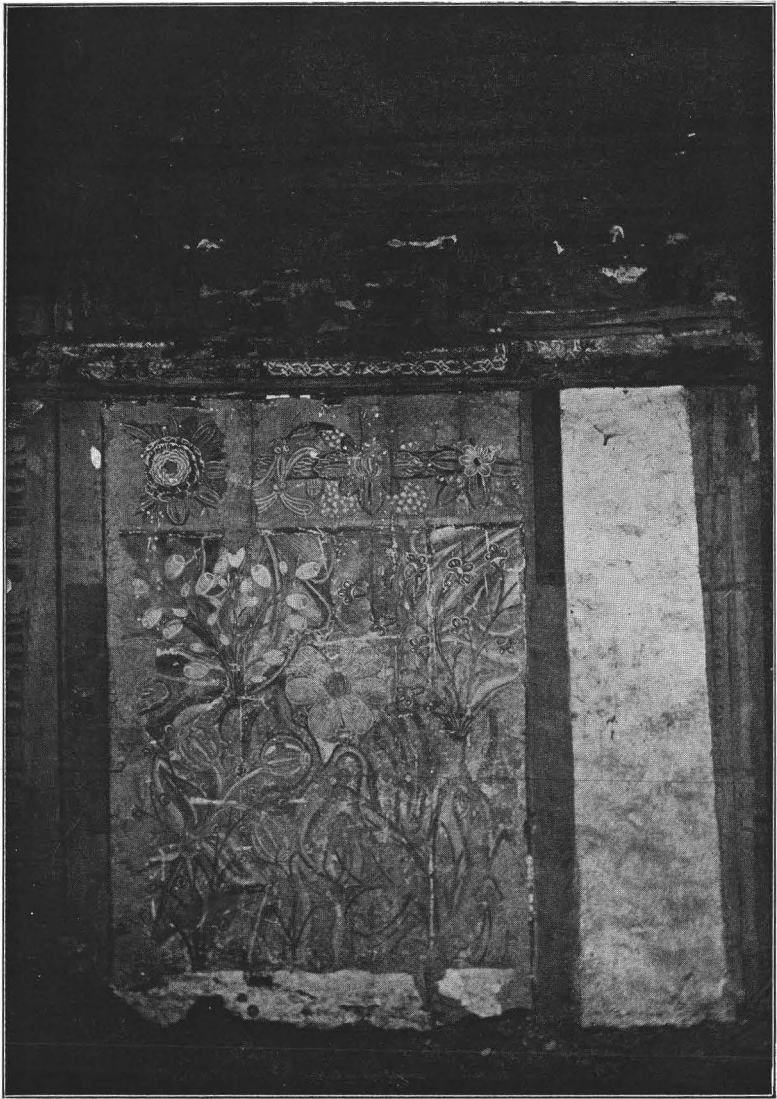


ANCIENT PAINTINGS AT "PEKES," CHIDDINGLY.

BY PHILIP MAINWARING JOHNSTON, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A.

"PEKES" is a farmhouse lately acquired by the Hon. Terence Bourke, in the parish of Chiddingly, and is associated with a junior branch of the important and ancient family of the Jefferays, who were seated in Sussex as early as the beginning of the fifteenth century, and who even then ranked as persons of wealth and consequence. They are, of course, prominently associated with Chiddingly Place, the principal house in the parish, which appears to have been rebuilt in a great measure, on a much extended plan, by the celebrated Sir John Jefferay, the Chief Baron of the Exchequer, who died in 1577.

Prior to this date, presumably in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, William Jefferay, who is usually called the founder of a junior branch of the family, came into possession of "Pekes," but I think it more than likely that the house he then found and occupied was even then of some antiquity; that he did not build it anew, but only altered and enlarged; and that the nucleus of the older house which he found upon the estate still remains. This nucleus is the skeleton framework of a timber hall, open from floor to roof, divided at intervals by story-post and great curved tie-beams, and still showing upon its rafters the furring of wood-smoke from the original central hearth. Although there are no distinctive marks of date, this ancient construction may be assigned with every probability to the middle of the fifteenth century. It then no doubt consisted, like so many others of its class, of a central open hall, flanked at either end by two-storied wings, in which were contained the buttery, parlour and sleeping apartments.



PAINTED PANEL AT "PEKES."

Early in the sixteenth century, when a greater degree of comfort and extra accommodation were called for, extensions and alterations were made, including perhaps what is now the kitchen, with its characteristic open fireplace, still spanned by a massive arched oak beam. William Jefferay, whose will is dated 20th August, 1543, may well have been the author of these improvements.

His elder son, another William Jefferay, through the death of the younger, Thomas, to whom "Pekes" had been bequeathed, came into possession of the house and lands, as is supposed, in about the last quarter of the sixteenth century (1572), and to him we no doubt owe the sub-dividing of the hall into two storeys containing a series of apartments and passages. The handsome stone fireplaces on both floors, with their Tudor arched heads (one left unfinished by the masons), are also due to William Jefferay. To the same hand we owe the lately discovered mural paintings, in a room in the upper storey fronting west, which in all probability served as his own bedroom. There is a window in the west wall, a stone fireplace in the south wall, and a door on the eastern side, which opens into the passage. The singular thing is that the elaborate paintings which this William caused to be made can only have had about 60 years of visible existence, as, supposing them to have been executed in about 1572, they must have been covered up by the panelling, which until the other day lined the walls from *circa* 1630. The method in which the paintings were executed is peculiarly interesting. To disguise as much as possible the inequalities of surface arising from the irregular construction of the room, a coarse-meshed linen was, in places, tightly stretched from floor to ceiling, covering the beams and post and panel walls, and over this was spread the thin coating of plaster on which the painting was executed. This method accounts for the total disappearance of the painting from the north wall, and its partial absence from the other walls, as the linen must have been largely ripped off when the later panelling was put up.

The paintings, although some 30 years later in date, have a good deal in common with the recently discovered wall-painting in a house at Rye, in the frieze with text-panels, the floral ground of the large strip on the east wall, and in the predominant sage-green and grey-blue notes of the colouring. At the same time, the drawing of the flowers is freer, and less conventional in this case than in the Rye painting. The intention of the artist has evidently been to represent in the large strip on the east wall a flower garden of the period, and with this object in view he has brought together some five or six varieties of flowering plants, which are growing in picturesque disarray, without any attempt at a formal arrangement for decorative purposes. The result is certainly very charming and original, and although it would be rash to attempt an identification of all the flowers, it seems probable that full-blown roses, anemones (or wind flowers), large daisies, pinks and Canterbury bells are among those represented.

In the space above full-blown roses and bunches of grapes are conventionally disposed, and these, together with apples, pears, &c., appear again in a frieze, parts of which remain all round the room. Originally there may have been a verse in "black letter" in the frieze on each wall. Two only now remain—on the north and south walls. They are painted in white characters on a slate-grey ground, with an elegant border of interlaced ovals and diamonds. As the frieze was painted on a third coat of plaster over the original tie-beams of the roof on these sides, and the plaster has become detached, these quaint verses are sadly injured and in danger of further destruction unless the loose parts of the plaster are secured to the wall by shellac or other means.

The verse on the north reads:—

In lyfe there ys no fure staye
 for fleashe as flower dothe vade awaye
 this carcas made of slyme and claye
 muste taste of deathe thear ys no way
 while we have tyme then let vs praye
 to god for grace bothe nighte and daye.



PAINTED FRIEZE AT "PEKES."

That on the south is:—

Beholde the ende ere thou begynne
 Have minde of deathe and fear to sinne
 For deathe shall ceare that lyfe hath sowne
 And lyfe shall springe wheare death hath mowne
 Give grace thearfore O god moste hye
 That we in Christe maye lyve and dye.

The plaster beneath the last verse and over the stone fireplace has been painted with an interlaced rectangular pattern enclosing flowers; below this it is lined out in white on red to imitate brickwork, and over the centre of the fireplace is a small painted panel, which may have had a date or initials thereon. Much of this is concealed from view by the fluted frieze of the oak panelling.

Probably there was originally painting upon the west or outer wall, but nothing of this now remains.

Curiously enough, some slight traces are to be seen upon the beam in the southern wall of a still earlier painting, apparently of late-fifteenth or early-sixteenth century date. A small head of a man with straight-cropped hair appears on a coat of buff-coloured distemper on the face of the tie-beam. This must have been high up from the floor when the open hall was undivided into storeys, unless the sub-division had taken place earlier, which is quite possible.

I should imagine that the later scheme of colour was executed by a travelling artist, who doubtless found plenty to do in journeying from one house to another of the gentry and yeomanry, who during the sixteenth century had grown into such a numerous class in Surrey and Sussex. At Scarlett's Mill, a late-sixteenth century house of this class in Cowden parish, Kent, close to the Sussex border (about 18 miles due north of Chiddingly), are to be seen painted verses and decoration of very similar character, with the date 1597.

The following particulars of painted verses, very similar in character and style of execution to those at Chiddingly, have been most kindly furnished by Miss Marion N. Cooper, daughter of our lamented late Chairman.

They were found over the fireplaces and elsewhere in the White House, Balcombe; and Miss Cooper adds that "The verses are in black letter, and were found behind bricks and plaster over two fireplaces, one downstairs and one in a bedroom. They" [the owner, Mr. Herman, and his family] "have had the words re-blacked, with the exception of one, which they have not been able to decipher." The word in the last line of the verse in the Hall appears to be "sigh," from the sense of the context.

From Miss Cooper's very clear description it is clear that these verses are about co-temporary with those at "Peaks," Chiddingly (*i.e.*, of about 1580), and they furnish another example of the rather gloomy piety of our Puritan ancestors.

Miss Cooper's description is as follows:—

IN THE HALL,

Surrounded by a brown frame, with ornamental work at the top, where a little pale blue colour is introduced. The spaces at the end of the lines are filled up by little patterns of scroll work.

"Behold the whole state of man
Who is borne to dye but dyes he knowes not when
How flower like doth flourish and decay
How soone deaths sithe doth cut him downe like hay
Who is borne with greeete, brough up with paine
And with a . . . h, doth leave the world a gaine."

Traces of blue and brown paint, similar to the top of the frame, were found on the other walls of this room, but not sufficient for restoration.

IN THE BEDROOM,

Surrounded by a kind of scroll work painted in yellow ochre, with a red Tudor rose in the centre at the bottom.

"O man remember watch and pray
And thinke upon thy dying daie."*

"MEMORARE NOUISSIMA."

(The two "ss" in the last word are almost interlaced, as if one had been inserted afterwards.)

The left side of the wall over this fireplace projects about four inches (to bring it to the same level as the wall of the room), and on this projection, which is about 18 inches wide, is

"Pray continually
In all things
Give thanks."

This has a vine scroll above in green, and underneath two yellow arches with leaves growing from them and a red rose in the centre of each. These roses are more like dahlias, and not the same as the one under the long inscription.