

AN INSCRIPTION AND MURAL PAINTING
IN A
HOUSE AT CHALFONT ST. PETER
[By E. CLIVE ROUSE]

An interesting example of original mural painting in a small house of late 16th century or early 17th century date is to be seen in Chalfont St. Peter. The house is in the village, on the east side of the London road, and is now occupied by Mr. Rance, as a green-grocer's shop, and dwelling. The inscription and painting are not listed in the Royal Commission Inventory, as they were only revealed by the removal of later plaster some years after the survey was taken.

They were discovered in 1918, when the wall-space over the window in the end gable of a room on the first floor was being washed down for re-plastering or whitewashing. Traces of colour and lettering were noticed, and the whole wall was eventually scraped and washed to remove the later plaster, etc., revealing the inscription with borders and flanking designs in colour. At the same time, traces of colour were also noticed on the corresponding wall at the opposite end of the room. But they were whitewashed over, as it was not then practicable to wash and scrape the wall. This is to be done shortly, and the result will be watched with interest. It is possible that, being on an inside wall, the painting may be better preserved than the other.

The painting covers the whole gable space. The measurements are approximately as under: Centre panel—inscription with border design — about 6 feet from queen-post to queen-post, and about 3 feet from tie beam, to collar beam. (A small ventilating space with iron flap has been inserted at some time destroying part of the upper border.) The flanking designs occupy the triangular spaces between the queen-posts

and rafters, and make up the total width to about 13 feet 6 inches.

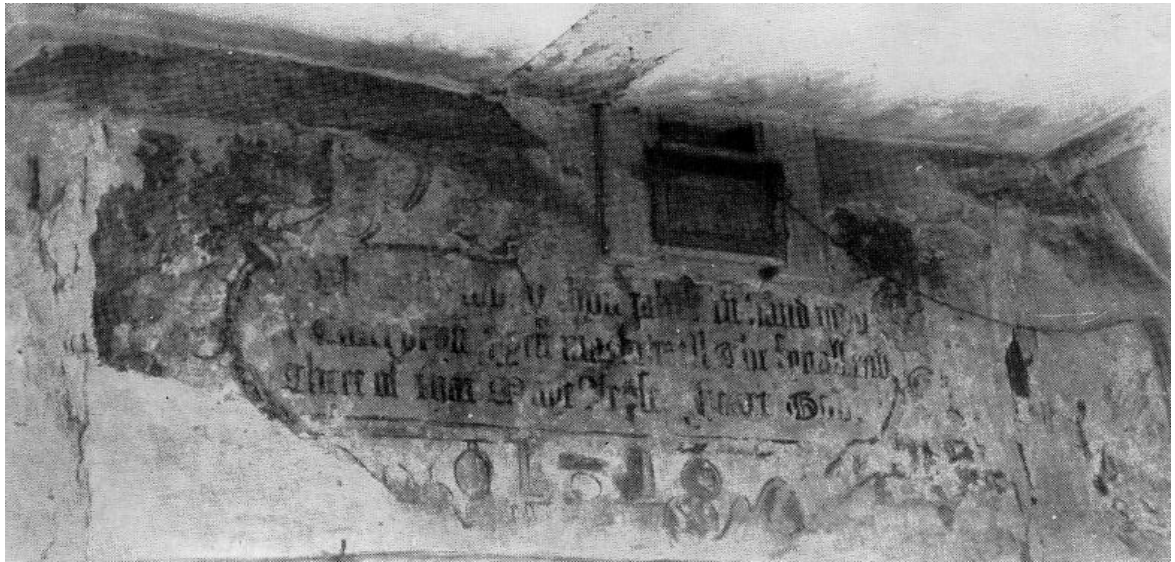
The inscription in the centre is in three lines, and reads as follows :—

**" When any thinge thou takest in hand to do
or Enterpryse fyrst markewell the fynall end
there of that Maye Aryse. Feare God."**

The characters are a kind of black-letter, and the whole is clearly the work of an unskilled hand. The irregular spacing, the mongrel forms of some of the letters, and the introduction of capitals in odd places is interesting. " The " in the second line, and " Maye " and " Aryse " in the last, are given capital T, M. and A, respectively, for their first letters. There is no space between the words " marke " and " well, " and it looks as if the artist had first painted "mark well" and afterwards decided that perhaps "mark" ought to have an " e, " and in inserting it had filled up the space before the next word. " Thereof " appears as two words; and so on.

The bordering and flanking designs are difficult to describe, since they are very imperfect. Surrounding the inscription, which is on what appears to represent a framed panel with curved ends, are conventional motifs, partly scrollwork and partly of a geometrical character, very crudely carried out. In the corners of the centre piece and in the triangular spaces some very good foliage appears, with traces of flowers, the stems forming quite a good conventional design. The colours are for the most part still quite clear, the paint-ing being above the window, and consequently exposed to little light. There are some good greens, reds, and browns. Very little attempt at realism is apparent, and there are no signs of any figures. The whole has suffered a good deal from chipping of the plaster and from damp.

As regards the date of this work, a comparison with the paintings at the Savoy, Denham, dated 1606, is both interesting and useful. Several points of similarity appear, particularly in the treatment of the



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surrounding designs and colouring, though of course the work at Chalfont is far more crude. In the lettering and date at the Savoy, ordinary Roman characters and Arabic numerals are used, so that the appearance of black-letter in the Chalfont painting (though obviously corrupt and consequently late in that style of lettering) would rather argue an earlier date. This, coupled with the crudeness of the general design and some other details, would lead one to date the painting no later than 16th century. This, however, is older than the date assigned to the house itself by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, who call it early 17th century (Vol. I., p. 85; monument No. 9), though some timber-framing with wattle and daub filling and other work certainly look earlier than this. However, the crude appearance of the painting and the black-letter inscription may perhaps be accounted for by the usual fact that craftsmanship in a remote place, as Chalfont St. Peter was in Elizabethan times, often lagged 40 or 50 years behind the fashion pre-vailing in more frequented places. The date appears certainly to be no later than 1600, and the exposure of the other wall may possibly afford further evidence for reaching a conclusion on this point.