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ROTHAMSTED
RESEARCH

The Manor of Rothamsted

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THE MANOR OF
ROTHAMSTED
AND ITS OCCUPANTS



2. The Mural Paintings in the Old Dining-room

Rothamsted Research

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APPENDICES

1. THE ARMS OF WITTEWRONGE

On 27 November 1648 Sir John Wittewronge's coat-of-arms was certified in Letters Patent, signed and sealed by Garter King of Arms. The information conveyed in these letters, which are preserved among the Wittewronge papers, concerning the family's arms is of some importance:

"...Sçavoir faisons, qu'estant venu a nostre cognoissance par l'Attestation de Iehan Lycenich dict de Luxemburg et Henry Prevost dict de La Val Roys des Armes a tistres respectiues des Comptes de Haynau & d'Artois, que les Armoiries de *Wittewronge* sont d'Argent à trois bendes de gueules au chef de Sable à la viure d'Or... Lesquelles Armes escartelé de gueules à une bande accompagnée de deux demy Cerfs d'Or, ont este portées par *Iaques Wittewronge* natif de Flandre, Père du feu *Jacob Wittewronge* de la mesme païs... Lequel Jacob Wittewronge fust père du Sieur *Iehan Wittewronge* de Rothamsted... Chevalier."

Perhaps the charge (gules a bend between two demi-stags salient or) with which Jacques Wittewronghele, Sir John's grandfather, quartered the arms of Wittewronge, and which has so far not been identified, belonged to the family of his wife, Mary Everdey. At any rate, the text and painted coat-of-arms in this document establish that the correct form of the Wittewronge arms, which have been variously represented and blazoned, is: argent three bends gules, on a chief sable a bar dancetty or.

2. THE MURAL PAINTINGS IN THE OLD DINING-ROOM

The left-hand portion of the battle-scene on the east wall, discovered in 1901 when the mid-seventeenth century panelling was removed, formed the subject of papers by C. E. Keyser (*Proc. Soc. Antiquaries*, 2nd ser., vol. XIX, 1901-2) and V. T. Hodgson (*Trans. St Albans & Herts. Archit. & Archaeol. Soc.*, New Series, vol. I, pt. 4, 1901-2).

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But in 1936, during some repairs occasioned by the fear of the death-watch beetle, a further and hitherto unknown section of the same scene, depicting a castle and its defenders, was disclosed. The whole painting, done on a fine plaster overlaying a considerable thickness of mortar and continuing over two of the oak uprights in the wall, was restored by Professor E. W. Tristram, and again in 1952 by Mr Arthur Shearsby.

(I) UPPER HALF (BATTLE SCENE)

Miss Carola Oman, who inspected the painting with a view to identifying the subject, writes:

‘The portion of the painting first opened up shows a hilly landscape, containing, in the background, indications of a distant village, and the spears of a re-inforcing party appearing over the brow of a hillock. In the foreground are four cannons with attendant gunners, and an armed figure on horseback leading twelve armed horsemen of inferior rank (demi-lances). Behind them, but on a lower level, comes another horseman in armour of a slightly different pattern. The landscape is painted in shades of green, blue and yellow, the outlines are all black, the horses are brown, black or white, and there are traces of red colouring on the breeches of some of the gunners, and on some of the pennons carried by the demi-lances.

‘It was supposed that the picture represented some battle in which a contemporary owner of the house had taken part, perhaps one of the two local battles of St Albans, although both took place in the 15th century.

‘The remainder of the picture, more recently discovered, shows that it really represents the siege of a castle, and in the background is seen a large town towards which routed skirmishers are retreating.

‘In style the whole closely resembles the illustrations to Walter Morgan’s *Chronicle of the Wars in the Low Countries*, 1572–9, preserved in the Library of All Souls’ College, Oxford, and Sir James Mann, Master of the Armouries, The Tower of London, considers that the armour of the combatants dates it as belonging to the last half of the 16th century.

‘The owners of Rothamsted at that date were named Bardolph, and one of them is said to have taken part in a military expedition to Scotland. From the Bardolphs the house passed to the Wittewronges, the first of whom covered up the picture with panelling.

‘Presuming that the artist was acquainted, at least by description, with the locality he was called upon to depict, it remains to discover a suitable siege, either in Great Britain or abroad, during the last half of the 16th century, in which a Bardolph may have been engaged. That a country gentleman of this date should cause some affair of quite secondary military importance to be so commemorated is by no means unprecedented, but too much reliance must not be placed on the topography of the painting—for instance, in the Hampton Court picture of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, whereas the forts defending Calais Haven are quite clearly shown, in the background, the country near Dunkirk rises suddenly into surprising Dolomite-like peaks.

‘So far, no search of sixteenth-century documents or illustrations has been successful in identifying the scene of the Rothamsted painting. The red and white colouring on the accoutrements of the attacking party—obviously the heroes of the story—may be intended to signify that they are English, red and white being the colours borne by normal English troops at this period, but no corresponding Spanish red and yellow, or Dutch blue and yellow, is displayed by the defenders, nor, as is common in pictures of this date, are there any descriptive legends above the troops, the castle, the town or the village. The expeditions to the Low Countries of Sir H. Gilbert, and the Earls of Leicester and Essex, are all of the right period, but no description of the siege of an isolated castle, outside a large town, in hilly country, is forthcoming.

‘It seems probable, therefore, that, should the picture be intended to represent any actual engagement, it must be placed in Great Britain. The sieges of Barnard Castle, during the “Rising in the North”, of Leith 1560, and Edinburgh Castle 1573, are all possibilities, and on the top of the castle, a chapel, which might be intended by an artist working from description for St. Margaret’s Chapel is visible; but the topography is equally unsuitable for all three.’

The Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments (Scotland) considered the identification of the building with Edinburgh Castle ‘a strong probability’.

Dr Marguerite Wood, a specialist on the history and topography of Edinburgh and Keeper of the Burgh Records, after examining a photograph of the painting, expressed the opinion that ‘the painting

definitely represents the siege of Edinburgh Castle in 1573. On that occasion batteries were placed to the North, South and West of the Town. The picture has not been made by an eye-witness, but from some one's description, for, though it shows Arthur's Seat and the Salisbury Crags in the correct place and a bit of the North Loch in the right foreground, the town is not placed correctly and the treatment of the castle is merely conventional. The view is from one of the batteries on the Lang Dykes, north of the Town and Castle.'

The painting formed the subject of a correspondence in *The Times* in April 1940, in which the prevailing opinion favoured the siege of Edinburgh Castle in 1573.

(2) LOWER HALF OR DADO

Underneath the battle-scene is painted a series of niches with scalloped heads, between columns supporting an entablature, each niche containing an animal, the whole being executed in a yellowish brown colour with black shading and white high lights—perhaps in imitation of marble—and in a markedly Renaissance style.

The animals may be intended to represent Vices. Dr Joan Evans writes:

'You will find many instances of the 14th and 15th centuries in France in which a Vice rides a beast—in a MS. of c. 1390 (Bib. Nat. franç. 400) Pride rides a lion, Envy a dog, Anger a boar, Sloth an ass, Avarice a mole, Greed a wolf, and Lust a goat. In the engravings of the *Château de Labour* printed by Simon Vostre, Anger rides a bear. A cat sometimes takes the place of an ass for Sloth. (For all this see Emile Mâle, *L'art religieux de la fin du moyen âge en France*, 1922, p. 354).

'Gradually the symbolism was simplified, and at Plolanff, Côtes du Nord, the animals alone appear. Here Pride is a peacock, Avarice a frog, Lust a goat, Greed a pig, Anger a lion, and Sloth a snail: but the scheme was never codified and was always liable to modification. My suggestion would be that the Rothamsted paintings of animals represent an English version of the same idea.'