

A Second Elizabethan Mural Painting in No. 3, Cornmarket Street, Oxford

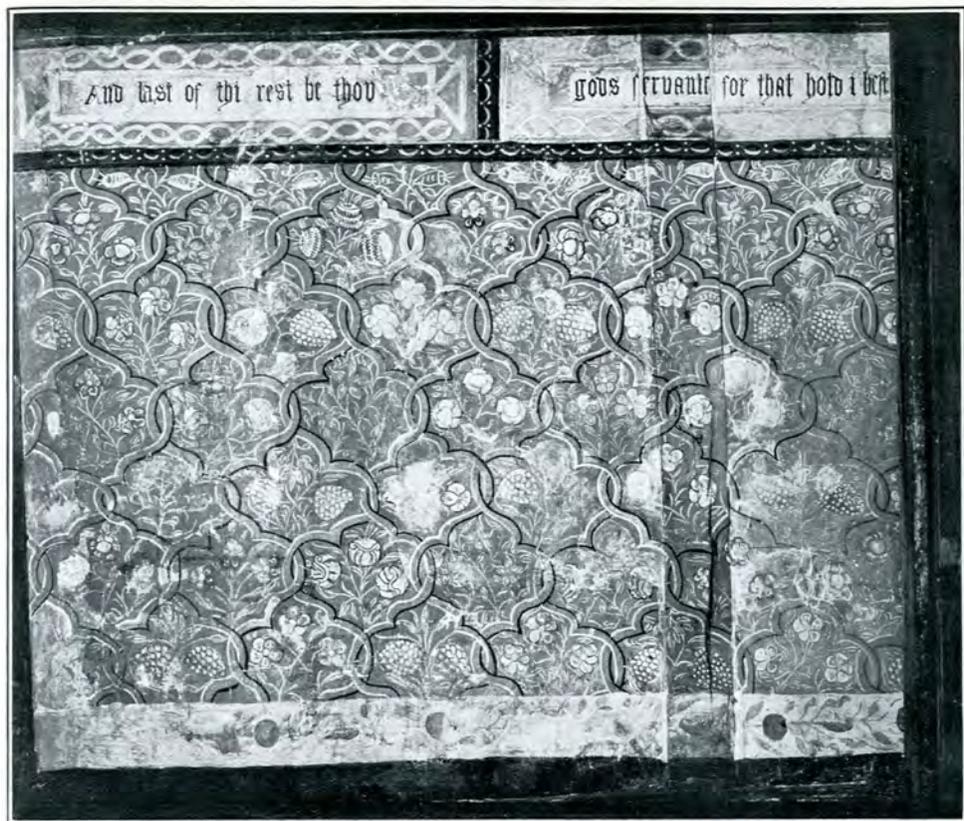
By E. T. LEEDS

THE discovery in 1927 of the 'Painted Room' on the first floor of No. 3, Cornmarket Street naturally aroused great interest owing to the fine condition of the painting, preserved as it had been during three centuries behind oak panelling that had been erected to hide it in accordance with early seventeenth century taste. Oxford, as is well known, owes the conservation of this admirable example of sixteenth century workmanship to the appreciation and public spirit of Mr. E. W. Attwood, who realised its antiquarian value and called in expert advice and services to ensure its proper treatment and its safety for the enjoyment of future generations of Oxford's citizens.

An account of the paintings, with a description of the design, an elaborate pattern of interlaced arabesques filled with various flowers, Canterbury bells, passion-flowers, wind-flowers and bunches of grapes, together with a transcript of the pious and homely adages inscribed in black-letter along the frieze (PLATE XX A) has been published in a paper entitled *Mural Paintings in Houses : with special reference to recent discoveries at Stratford-on-Avon and Oxford*, read by Mr Philip M. Johnston, F.S.A., to the British Archaeological Association in 1931.¹

The author of the paper introduces his account of the Oxford paintings with a history of the house and its occupants during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and recalls the connexion of the house with Shakespeare arising from his friendship with the Davenants, the senior member of which family became tenant of the house with a licence to sell wine by retail in or about 1603. On certain points in Mr. Johnston's account I shall have occasion to comment later. Mr. Johnston assigns the execution of the principal paintings (signs of underpainting of earlier date are revealed on the chimney-breasts) to a date between 1550 and 1560, an opinion evidently based on stylistic grounds, since he gives no other reasons for it. Indeed the black-letter legends and the style of the paintings goes well with an Elizabethan date.

¹ *Journ. Brit. Arch. Ass.*, n.s. xxxvii (1932), 75 ff.



A. Detail of the decoration of the north wall in the 'Painted Room.'

After J.B.A.A., n.s. xxxvii (1932), pl. 8, by courtesy of the British Archaeological Association.



B. Detail of the decoration in the back room.
NO. 3, CORNMARKE STREET, OXFORD.



A. View of the south wall and fireplace of the back room, now demolished.



B. Detail of the frieze in the back room, showing the initials I T.

NO. 3, CORNMARKE STREET, OXFORD.

Corn Market Street

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A more recent discovery not only confirms the accuracy of his stylistic diagnosis, but also sets the paintings against an historical background and permits an even closer dating than that assigned to them by Mr. Johnston.

In 1934, when the property was taken over by Messrs. J. Lyons & Co., the upper front storeys and with them the 'Painted Room' were reserved from the demolition and reconstruction demanded by modern commercial requirements.

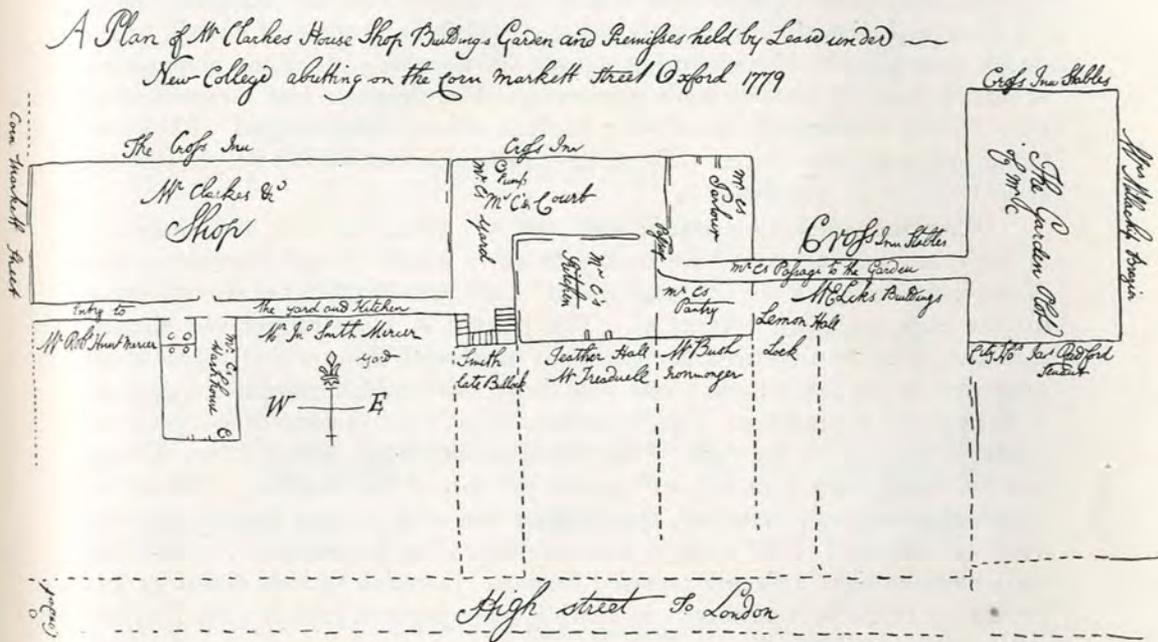


FIG. 23

PLAN OF NO. 3, CORNMARKE STREET

showing the excrescence labelled 'Mr. C's Washhouse' on the S. wall of the first floor of which the painting was found. The house apparently ceased to be a tavern in 1745, when it was leased by John Austin, mercer, whose son-in-law James Clarke was.

Reproduced by courtesy of the Warden and Fellows of New College, Oxford.

The whole of the back premises was, however, pulled down and with it a curiously anomalous annex consisting of a tier of small rooms projecting from the south side of the main front building into the adjoining tenement, and immediately east of the main front building. This excrescence appears on a plan (FIG. 23) preserved among the muniments of New College, the former owners of the property. The plan is dated 1779, and on it the excrescence is labelled 'washhouse,' a title that can only have applied to the ground-floor,

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and that perhaps specifically to the time at which the plan was drawn, since long before that date it was surmounted by two more storeys, the first of which had evidently been a room of some importance in the ménage of the house. At the time of its demolition its walls, like those of the 'Painted Room,' were entirely covered by oak panelling, now installed in a front room immediately south of the 'Painted Room.' This panelling itself is interesting. It appears to be slightly older in style than that of the 'Painted Room,' the chamfers of the framing being of simpler workmanship. Originally some, if not all, of the panels were painted with charming, simple flower-motifs in red and green, some of which have fortunately been preserved. The fireplace had a surround of blue Dutch tiles mostly portraying Biblical scenes, intermingled with a few genre and landscape pieces. These have been reset round the fireplace in the same room as the panelling.

When the panelling was removed from its original position, the south wall of the room was found to have been painted in a style closely resembling that of the main design of the 'Painted Room' itself, and in the same strong orange for the main colour (PLATE XX B). The pattern is more formal and simpler than the other, and consists of quatrefoils filled with flowers that repeat those portrayed in the other room; one new flower, however, a marguerite, appears in the uppermost register. This decoration (PLATE XXI A) covered not only the plaster above and to the right of the fireplace, but even extended over a large wooden beam built into the wall across the top of the fireplace. When the Dutch tiles had been removed, the fireplace was seen to have been bricked up flush with the wall of the room to receive them. On the removal of this filling there came to light a deeply recessed fireplace, intended to hold fire-dogs and backed by brick-work arranged in herring-bone pattern, just like the fireplace in the 'Painted Room.'¹

The chief interest of the wall-painting lies in the frieze. Like that of the 'Painted Room,' it is ornamented with labels containing black-letter inscriptions. Of these only a few letters can be deciphered owing to damage by damp. The label at the right-hand end appears to read *Trbt al[waic]*. Alternating with the labels are three roundels. That on the left contains two large capital letters I T (PLATE XXI B); the other two are illegible. There can be no possible question about the person indicated by these initials. He is John Tattleton, occupier of the house from some time after 1560 until his death in 1581. The *terminus post quem* is supplied by the New College lease-books in which is recorded a lease of the adjoining tenement northwards, known as Royse's tenement. Here the occupier on the south is given as Edmund Benet. Benet

¹ Johnston, *op. cit.*, pl. vi.

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did not die till 1602,¹ but Tattleton's tenure may be limited yet further downwards to the years 1564 to 1581, as suggested by the lease of this southern tenement in 1564 to Tattleton himself.

TABLE SHOWING LESSEES (in roman) AND OCCUPIERS (in italics) OF THE THREE TENEMENTS, NOW NOS. 3-5, CORNMARKE STREET, OXFORD, DURING THE SECOND HALF OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Date of Lease	Cross Inn (No. 5, Cornmarket)	Royse's tenement (No. 4, Cornmarket)	Tattleton's (No. 3, Cornmarket)
1553	John Walklyne, 'inholder'		
1555		<i>Robert Forest</i>	Thomas Malyson
1560		Elizabeth Forest, widow	<i>Edmund Benet</i>
1561	Jhōn Wakline, 'inholder'		
1564			John Tattleton
1574	William Hough, furrier		
1583	William & Joan Hough <i>John Walklin</i>	Pearse Underhill	John Underhill, D.D. <i>late Elizabeth Tattleton</i>
1592	William Hough, furrier & Joan his wife	<i>John Royce</i>	William Hough the younger <i>William Hough, furrier</i>
1602		Isaac Bartlemewe	
1605	Andrew Leigh of London, gent.		

The date of the decoration, as also that of the 'Painted Room,' thus lies in the seventeen years between 1564 and 1581 and it may fairly be assumed that it belongs to the earlier part of this period. The painting is thus some ten years younger than Mr. Johnston's estimate.

John Tattleton died, as has been said, in 1581, and his widow in 1582, after which the lessee of the tenement is given as William Hough the younger, while at the same time William Hough, furrier, is named as the occupier. The latter appears as lessee of the Cross Inn (after the death of one John Wakelyn

¹ A. Clark, *Wood's City of Oxford*, III, 231.

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or Walklyn)¹ in 1574, 1585, and 1592. His widow Joan, who remarried twice, appearing as Joan Staunton in 1601, and in 1622 as 'Johann fludde,' widow, in the parish of 'St. Wulthers (Sepulchre) in the Cittie of London,' transfers by deed of gift 'to my naturall and dutifull sonne' Daniel Hough, B.D., of Lincoln College, Oxford, the garden of the tenement that had previously been occupied by Tattleton.

It lies perhaps outside the scope of this paper, but it should be noted that there is a strong presumption that it was through William Hough's twice remarried widow that William Davenant, Shakespeare's friend, migrated from London to Oxford, to appear here in June, 1603, as a vintner in occupation of the house. Actually he was here earlier, because one of his children was baptized in St. Martin's, in February 1602 (old style)² but he eventually replaces Pierce Underhill, who held a wine licence and died between January 28 and February 7, 1603 (old style). It only remains to add that Joan flude (Flood), alias Staunton, alias Hough, started life as Joan Underhill, sister of Pierce Underhill. Underhill is lessee of Royse's tenement in 1583, and in the same year No. 3, Cornmarket is leased to John Underhill, D.D., manifestly a relative, so that, when all is said, for some time after 1583 the three tenements, the Cross Inn, Royse's tenement, and the eventual Crown Tavern, were all in the family.³

This may all seem rather beside the mark, but it has an important bearing on the point I wish to make. Mr. Johnston in the paper mentioned above remarks that, prior to Davenant's occupancy, no evidence exists to show that the third tenement was a tavern at all. There is indeed no specific documentary statement to attest it, but in my appendix to Mr. Arthur Acheson's *Shakespeare's Sonnet Story, 1592-1598*, written in 1922, I showed⁴ that there was every reason to believe that the house had been a tavern for a long time previously, and indeed the admirably constructed cellars below the frontal building that contains the 'Painted Room' were obviously intended for use as wine-cellars. When I saw them over twenty years ago the brick benches for the barrels were still intact. The exact age of the house is uncertain, but it is perhaps not realized by the passer-by that the plain eighteenth century front masks a timber construction filled with lath and plaster, and consequently one that can go back in time to 7 Edward VI (1553) or earlier. That it does so is more than suggested by the

¹ This was probably in 1574, when the lease was granted to Hough: Wakelin's widow died in 1580. The name is evidently Wakelin or Wakeling; but far commoner in the documents are Walklyn and Waukelin, which reproduce the contemporary pronunciation.

² It has been argued by the late Arthur Acheson in *Shakespeare's Sonnet Story, 1592-1598*, that Davenant came to Oxford as far back as 1592. It seems hardly possible that his name should not have occurred in any University or City record until 1601.

³ I have purposely avoided the name of the Crown, because the house did not receive this name until 1666; see E. T. Leeds in the appendix to Acheson, *op. cit.*, pp. 592-3.

⁴ E. T. Leeds in Acheson, *op. cit.*, pp. 581-606.

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mouldings of the fireplace in the 'Painted Room' and by the great I H S monogram revealed beneath Tattleton's decoration on the chimney-breast. There is, therefore, especially with the cellars in mind, every reason to believe that even before 7 Edward VI, the year of the licensing Act which determined the number of taverns in any given town (a Tudor version of the restriction of hours of opening), No. 3, Cornmarket was a tavern. The Act makes it clear that only in the taverns could wine be sold by retail. Oxford's quota was by the Act restricted to three licences, and the next century saw an unremitting squabble between the City and the University about the right to license, which was vested by the same Act in the chief officer of the city or town concerned. The rival claims of the Chancellor and the Mayor were bitterly contested; other parties, like Raleigh, complicated matters still further by obtaining special grants for Oxford; and the outcome was that at times there were six, at others three only, but usually four or five licences in being. And even in the early eighteenth century there still remained four, at a time when the coffee-houses were ousting the taverns in popularity, and the Colleges were following the example set by Blackstone as Bursar of All Souls in laying down their own cellars, instead of, as in the case of that College, 'going across the way to the Three Tuns (on the site of part of University College) to drink bad wine.'

The task of unravelling the wine-licences issued during the sixteenth century subsequent to the passing of the Act is an almost impossible one, but three of the persons connected with the group of New College tenements in the Cornmarket at one time or another obtained licences, namely John Wakelin, Pierce Underhill, and William Hough the elder. Of these, Wakelin appears as occupier of the Cross Inn and as an innholder, and it might be inferred that he employed his licence for that house. There are, however, two objections to that. In the first place, the licence was purely personal; only in the seventeenth century do we meet with an instance of express attachment to a particular house.¹ Secondly, not a single instance can be cited of an innholder at any other of the great Oxford inns, the Bear, the Angel, or the Mitre, receiving a licence.

Wakelin obtained his licence in 1558, and he was apparently one of the first licensees recorded on the City books after the passing of the Act. His licence was recalled in 1562, but in 1579 one was granted to John Dennis 'with the consent of William Hough which had the former grant,' and, since in 1574 and again in 1583 Hough leases the Cross in place of Wakelin, who, however, is still named in 1583 as its occupier, it becomes certain that from the first there existed close relations between the Cross and No. 3, and that the licence was obtained by Wakelin in order to have in his own hands both the provision of

¹ This was at the Mermaid, the older Swyndlestock, the peculiarly City tavern, and was evidently with the idea of keeping the licence out of the range of the Chancellor.

wine for his guests at the inn and the profits arising from its sale. Possibly he abused his privilege; more probably he would not pay high enough for it in fines, but that is no reason for assuming that the occupiers of No. 3 were not his agents. It is when William Hough becomes lessee of the Cross that we first meet with Tattleton at No. 3, and the mere fact that long after his death—even so late as 1613—the tenement occupied by him can still be known as ‘Tattleton’s house’ must mean that it was a well-known place of resort, for he certainly did not build it. Undoubtedly, even in his time, the house was a tavern and had been such for a long time before that, even back into mediaeval times. The Act of 1553 suppressed redundant houses; it did not close every tavern-door: the personal nature of the licences does not imply that old-established taverns ceased to exist. There is one more piece of evidence. Pierce Underhill obtained from the University in 1596 a licence to keep an inn and sell wine. He had leased Royse’s tenement in 1583, and was, as we have seen, a brother-in-law of William Hough who died in 1593. In February 1604 Underhill, by his will, makes an assignment of the remainder of his lease of the Cross, which, as he states, he had obtained from William Hough’s widow. Six months later, Underhill’s wine licence having been extinguished by his death, John Davenant, who already in April, 1603, is styled ‘vintner,’ obtains a licence from the City in his own name and uses it as No. 3.¹

It is consequently safe to infer that when Tattleton came into occupation he decided to furbish up part at least of the house, including, as we now know, the ‘Painted Room’ and the smaller room similarly decorated. What purpose these rooms served is of course unknown, but it is likely enough that the larger was used as a guest-room, possibly like the Master’s Room for senior members of the University at the Three Tuns, while the smaller, with his initials on the frieze, was his own particular sanctum. If that be so we can carry the assumption still farther and conclude that it was Davenant who installed the panelling, and thus protected the mural painting, little knowing that one day his predecessor’s *demodé* decoration would prove to have the greater interest.

Even now the painting of the smaller room has not entirely perished. The City authorities decided to see whether part of the painted wall could not be saved. The attempt proved successful so far as removal was concerned. A large portion from the left side, including the roundel that contains Tattleton’s initials, as well as the whole of the beam over the fireplace, was detached and encased, and has been stored until a suitable opportunity and place can be found to display it once more.² A smaller fragment, showing the details of the design has been placed in the City Library, Oxford.

¹ It is, therefore, just possible that the date of Davenant’s arrival in Oxford can be thrown back to 1596, since Underhill could not have used a wine-licence at the Cross itself.

² *Oxford Univ. Gazette*, LXV (1934-5), 443.