

THE ROYAL ARMS AT WESTERHAM.

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WESTERHAM, on the western border of Kent and at the head of the beautiful Darent Valley, has achieved celebrity as the birthplace of General Wolfe. To the memory of this modest hero, who is said to have wished rather to have written Gray's *Elegy* than to capture Quebec, there has been erected a statue on the village green, and a mural tablet is placed over the south doorway of the church; while it is also contemplated to furnish the south chapel as a further Wolfe memorial.

A description of the parish church, dedicated to St. Mary, will be found among the Proceedings for 1913, in *Arch. Cant.* XXXI, lii-lvii, but it is remarkable that no reference occurs in this account to one of the most interesting and valuable objects which the building contains, a Royal Arms of King Edward VI, at once the earliest of the series of framed Royal coats in Kentish churches and an item of great rarity in the whole country. As but little notice has been taken of these Westerham arms even elsewhere, it is the purpose of this paper to supply the deficiency. As will be seen later, Westerham Church had at one time the perhaps unique distinction of possessing the arms of three different sovereigns, one of which coats has since unhappily disappeared.

It being my intention, when sufficient information has been collected, to attempt a classification of all the Royal Arms depicted in this form which still remain in the parish churches of Kent, together with some general remarks on the subject, but little need be said here by way of introduction to the Westerham example.

The belief—still too widely current—that the custom of displaying the Royal Arms in churches is of post-Reformation



WESTERHAM CHURCH.
Royal Arms of Edward VI.

introduction is unfounded. Heraldry played a prominent part in the adornment of churches during the later Middle Ages, through the medium of carving, painting, stained glass, and needlework ; and in times when the coat armour of great families was an everyday sight in religious buildings, it would have been strange if that of their overlord had been missing. The King was, moreover, held to be possessed of a semi-spiritual character, and the considerable part played by the Crown in matters ecclesiastical, even before the Reformation, rendered it a fitting and natural thing for the emblems of Royal authority to be introduced into the chief public building of town and village. Their display in such places as King's College Chapel in Cambridge is almost ostentatious in its repetition ; it is not, of course, contended that the average country church bore any parallel to these, but the mediæval craftsman frequently depicted the Royal Arms in the windows, on articles of church furniture, and even on vestments and altar frontals. The custom of restricting this varied display to a single picture or carving appears to have developed about the time of the Reformation, when no doubt a certain amount of party capital was made out of this ancient usage by the protagonists of the Royal Supremacy ; but it was not made compulsory to set up the Royal Arms in churches until after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660.

During the severe ordeal of the restoration of churches in the days of the Gothic Revival of the last century, a great number of Royal Arms perished, along with so many other things of beauty whose only crime was that they were post-mediæval and not Gothic. Kent, however, is fortunate in having preserved a great many examples, the neighbourhood of Romney Marsh being remarkably rich in this respect. Of the series of Royal Arms in the particular form of a picture or carving, Westerham may claim the distinction of heading the list.

The Royal Arms of England have, of course, undergone considerable changes in their composition throughout the centuries, but it is proposed to defer the discussion of these

alterations until the future paper treating of the subject in general.

It suffices here to note that the arms of Edward VI at Westerham display the later form of the beautiful quartered coat of France and England which originated with Edward III's claim to the French crown and which he adopted about the year 1340, blazoned as : *Quarterly, 1 and 4, azure, semy of fleurs-de-lys or ; 2 and 3, gules, three leopards or.* This treatment of the French quarters is known as "France ancient." About 1365 Charles V reduced the number of golden lilies to three, making "France modern," but in this country the depiction of the French arms continued as before, as may be seen, for example, on the effigy of the Black Prince at Canterbury, who died in 1376. No change was made in England until about 1405, when Henry IV brought English pretensions to French sovereignty up to date at last by adopting "France modern" as his first and fourth quarters. In this form the Royal Arms of England continued until the union of the English and Scottish crowns at the accession of James I and VI in 1603.

The supporters of the Royal shield were very varied during the fifteenth century, the same monarch sometimes using different combinations of beasts. The commonest pair, however, after the accession of the Tudor dynasty, was the English lion and the Welsh dragon, which appear in the Westerham achievement. The Scottish sovereigns, from the reign of James IV (1488-1513), had used as their supporters two unicorns *argent*, and at the union of the two crowns in 1603 James VI replaced the dragon used by Elizabeth by one of his unicorns, since which date these supporters have remained unchanged. In England the lion was retained as the dexter, but in Scotland the more honourable side has never been vacated by the unicorn, the lion being put on the sinister ; and the bearings of Scotland occupy the first and fourth quarters of the Royal Arms as borne to-day north of the Tweed.

The arms of Edward VI in Westerham Church date from *circa* 1550, and are now hung upon the north wall

of the tower, whither they were probably removed at the restoration of 1852 or that of 1883. That they were formerly elsewhere is apparent from the following extract from the *Gentleman's Magazine* for December, 1807, p. 1104, one of the few previously existing notices of this remarkable painting :

“ At the West end of the South aisle are the King's arms, painted in the reign of Edward VI. as appears by the letters ‘ R.E.’ and ‘ D'n'e Salvu' fac Regem ’ ; and in the North aisle is another bearing the date 1662.”

These arms are of great value on account of their unusual features and their high antiquity. The six years' reign of the boy-king Edward was so short, and the succeeding times so troubled, that it is small wonder that very few examples of his arms have survived. I am not personally acquainted with any other existing genuine example,¹ although it is known that several such coats of Edward VI were set up in churches. Instances are cited in J. C. Cox and A. Harvey, *English Church Furniture*, 1907, p. 352, and in Cox, *English Church Fittings* (introd. by Aymer Vallance), 1923, p. 166, where are also references to arms of Henry VI and Henry VIII. It is the more remarkable that in neither work is any notice taken of the actually surviving example at Westerham. Probably no Royal Arms of Mary Tudor remains : a beautifully executed carved wooden coat, dated 1558, remains at Waltham Abbey in Essex, and was attributed by Cox to this queen, but it much more probably belongs to Elizabeth, set up about the time of her coronation, which in Old Style reckoning would still be in 1558 : moreover Marian arms usually occur impaled with those of Philip II of Spain, whereas the Waltham example is merely France and England quarterly. The only mention of the Edwardian arms at Westerham that I have been able to find occurs in Leveson-Gower (quoted hereafter) and *Gent. Mag.* for December, 1807, already mentioned.

¹ On the modern screen in Davington Priory Church is a reproduction of a Royal Arms of Edward VI, 1553, copied from a fireback at Wells given to Thomas Willement, F.S.A. ; see *Arch. Cant.*, XXII, p. 190.

The picture is painted in oils upon four oak boards joined together and enclosed in a moulded frame, forming a square, surmounted by a triangular headpiece similarly framed except along its bottom edge. These frames have certainly been repainted at a later period, in greenish-yellow, to imitate marble, which suggests that the Georgian era is responsible for this questionable decoration. This being the case, it is not easy to determine whether the frames were then renewed, though from their similarity of moulding to that of the original roundel in the headpiece it is quite possible that they are contemporary with the picture, though re-decorated. The painting and its frame form a square of $41\frac{3}{4}$ inches, and the headpiece measures 34 by 24 by 24 by $16\frac{3}{4}$ inches deep. We may now proceed to a detailed description of the whole composition.

The arms, *Az.* 3 *fleurs-de-lys* or *quartering gu.* 3 *leopards or*, are borne upon a nearly oval cartouche, bordered with scrollwork in red and edged and adorned with yellow. Encircling the shield is a garter *azure* with the legend in golden Roman capitals (the asterisks representing cinquefoil ornaments of the same colour) :

: HONI : * : SOIT : * : QVI : * : MAL : * : Y : * : PENSE :

The garter is edged and buckled *or*, with two loops *gu.* on either side near the top, and pendants of the same colour below, next the supporters.

The golden crown surmounting the garter is of the massive closed or "Imperial" form familiar in Tudor heraldry, and is lined with ermine. Neither the jewels in this crown nor in that of the dexter supporter are in proper colours, being merely outlined in black upon the gold framework in which they are set.

The dexter supporter is a golden lion crowned imperially, the sinister a dragon, tinctured unusually *or* instead of *gules*, the same pair continued in commonest use during the long reign of Elizabeth. Both these creatures are pleasingly depicted as lithe and lean, retaining much of the feeling and spirit of mediæval heraldry ; but in the manner of rendering

the charges upon the quartered shield may be detected an early instance of the later corrupt practice of painting shadows beneath each. Modern heraldic design has fortunately almost wholly discarded this treatment, which, together with the diminution in size and boldness of the charges, had so much impaired the effect of most of the later coat armour. The treatment of the dragon's tongue, tinctured gold, which is split into several ends, suggests that it may rather be intended for fiery breath.

At the foot of the composition is placed a rectangular compartment bearing the mottoes, painted black and having a border of yellow, the ornaments of which, like the other scrollwork in the whole picture, are of Renaissance character. In this compartment are two lines of golden Roman capitals, the uppermost interrupted by the pendent end of the garter. The first reads :

DÑE · SALVĪ · FAC · REGEM ·

The second :

DIEV · ET — MON · DROIT

The dash represents a conventional ornament of stalk-like character.

In the dexter lower corner is the capital letter R, and in the sinister E, both in gold, denoting "Edwardus Rex." The references to "rex" upon the painting are important, as without them there might be doubt whether these arms are not equally probably those of Elizabeth.

Flanking the great crown, near the upper corners of the picture are painted two further tablets, with black backgrounds and bordered and lettered in gold, each with a pendent golden tassel. These tablets are hung on gold rings touching the upper frame, and scalloped ribbons of the same colour extend from the rings to the top of the crown, stopping just short of its finial cross. On the tablets, an uncommon feature, at first sight suggesting banners, are inscribed in Roman capitals :

Dexter : VIVAT *Sinister* : CVRAT
, REX , , LEX ,

The use of the indicative mood in the latter inscription is perhaps singular, where the continuance of the subjunctive would read more smoothly.

The background of the whole achievement and its accessories is black. The blue of the garter and the field of the French quarters has become a very dark brown with age, and that of the English ones has almost disappeared, leaving but faint traces of red. This decay has been wisely left *in statu quo* in the restoration just completed.

In the centre of the triangular headpiece is the roundel with moulded frame previously mentioned. This frame retains its original colouring of green, bordered with yellow. The roundel bears, on a dark green background, the Gothic letters *IhS*, in gold, outlined with red. This is also an interesting and unusual feature—the depiction of a religious symbol along with Royal Arms. The spandrels of the triangle were probably repainted along with the frames, and show a light blue field edged with darker blue, which is also the hue of the trefoil in each of the two lower angles.

As may be imagined in the case of a picture of such antiquity, these arms of Edward VI, of which I believe the foregoing detailed description to be the first that has been attempted, have suffered by the passage of time, though it is fortunate that the destruction of such objects prevalent in the last century did not make away with them altogether. I made an examination of this achievement in June, 1931.

The surface of the boards had become uneven and cracks had gaped in places between them, nor had the oak on its back surface escaped the ravages of worm. The painting had here and there faded very considerably, making the inscriptions difficult to decipher and the taking of a good photograph almost impossible. I accordingly applied to the Rev. J. A. Castle, Vicar of Westerham, who has shown great kindness and interest in the matter. During the months following the arms were taken down from the tower wall and sent for expert treatment to Mr. W. J. Morrill, of 3 Duck Lane, W.1, who has carried out a wholly satisfactory restoration, on careful lines which have avoided any

“ spick and span ” effect afterwards, while greatly increasing the visibility of the whole composition. It will be well to place on permanent record what has been done.

The whole painting was cleaned, without re-touching, and then treated with a preservative process, and a solution destructive of worm applied to the back, the part affected. The cracks between the boards have been filled with putty, carefully painted over to harmonise with the black background, and nine new oak “ buttons ” or rivets, three in each line, attached behind to prevent any subsequent reopening of the boards. The only repainting, and this a legitimate restoration, has been applied to the word SALVĒ in the foot inscription, where the final stroke of the last letter had perished, but leaving traces of its former presence. It is to be hoped that members of the Kent Archæological Society will pay a visit to Westerham Church and see the restored arms, now put in good condition for posterity. The thanks of antiquaries and heralds are due to the Vicar for his goodness in having the preservation of an object of the greatest interest and historic value thus happily carried out.

It has been mentioned earlier that Westerham Church at one time contained three different Royal coats of arms : all three were still existing in 1807, when the *Gentleman's Magazine* account of the church epitaphs was written. One has since unhappily disappeared, probably at the first restoration of the building in 1852, as it had gone by the time of the publication of Granville Leveson-Gower's *Parochial History of Westerham*, which appeared at the time of the second restoration of 1883. This work mentions the two remaining coats, and refers to the former existence of the lost one, also mentioned in 1807 as then being in the north aisle. This was of Charles II, set up soon after the Restoration, in 1662. Leveson-Gower (*op. cit.*, p. 32) quotes an extract from the churchwardens' accounts relative to it :

“ 1662. Paid for drawing y^e Kings Armes, £4. For a frame, £1 6s.”

The third coat of arms, of George III, 1804, now hangs over the south doorway of the tower opposite to those of Edward VI, although an early Victorian engraving of the interior of the church, hanging in the inner vestry north of the tower, shows it as then fixed on the S.W. face of the second free pillar from the east of the northern arcade, over the position of the present pulpit, which has supplanted the earlier "three decker," standing on the north side of the chancel.

This achievement is painted on canvas, the background coloured brown, and enclosed in a black wooden frame. The heraldry is correctly depicted—which is not always the case in the elaborate Hanoverian bearings with their many charges—but, like the average early nineteenth century arms, the artistic merit of the composition has fallen greatly from the standard of the Edwardian example facing it, and its interest is almost wholly historic. At the top, in flourishing gold type, are the letters G R, with the Roman figure III set over the lion statant which surmounts the crown upon the helmet. At the base of the achievement is the date 1804.

The heraldry is that of the new Royal Arms of George III, after the final removal of the French fleurs-de-lys at the Union with Ireland in 1801. The blazon is therefore as follows :

Quarterly, 1 and 4, England ; 2, Scotland ; 3, Ireland ;¹ with an escutcheon of pretence for Hanover (removed in 1801 from the fourth quarter) : Per pale and per chevron, 1, *Gu.* two leopards *or* (Brunswick) ; 2, *Or*, semy of hearts, a lion rampant *az.* (Lunenburgh) ; 3, *Gu.* a horse courant *arg.* (Westphalia) ; 4, surtout, on an inescutcheon *gu.* the crown of Charlemagne *or.* The escutcheon of pretence is ensigned with the electoral bonnet, *gu.* turned up ermine and tasselled *or*, as borne 1801-16, when a crown replaced it.

The loss of the Charles II coat still leaves Westerham Church distinctive in Kent by the possession of two examples

¹ *Gu.* three leopards *or* ; *Or*, a lion rampant in a double tressure counter-flory *gu.* ; *Az.*, a harp *or*, stringed *arg.*

of Royal Arms, which is uncommon ; St. Leonard's, Deal, at the opposite end of Kent, shares this rarity, having coats both of William III and Anne (before 1707), the latter with motto *Dieu et mon droit* instead of *Semper eadem*, generally used by this queen.