

THE ARMS OF JAMES II AT
WEST MALLING.

BY V. J. B. TORR.

IN *Archæologia Cantiana*, XLIII, 285-294, are described and illustrated the very valuable royal arms of King Edward VI in Westerham church. The aim of this paper is to do as much for another heraldic example of great excellence and rarity, those of James II in the church of West, or Town Malling.

Although the setting up of the king's arms in churches became compulsory only after the restoration of Charles II in 1660, we have seen that it was already a custom of some antiquity. A document of considerable interest in this connexion is printed in Cox & Harvey, *English Church Furniture* (1907), p. 353, wherein Archbishop Abbot (1611-33) licenses, on Oct. 24th, 1631, "our wellbeloved in Christ Thomas Hanbage, paynterstayner" to visit the parish churches, and even chapels of the diocese and peculiars of Canterbury; and wheresoever the royal arms should be found either wanting or *defaced* the said Thomas is to paint them, *inter alia*, "in colours or otherwise . . . with Helmett, Crest, and Mantle, as in most Churches of England the same are now adorned," all incumbents and church officers being desired to give him assistance. A commission of this magnitude, even if only partly executed, must have resulted in a considerable number of Caroline arms being set up in Kent, all since unfortunately lost.

The royal arms of the Stuart, or Stewart dynasty (the former spelling, as that in common use, will be used hereafter) still remain in fair number in English churches, despite the replacement of many examples by Hanoverian arms, and the lamentable losses of *hoc genus omne* in the fiery furnace of Victorian days.

A large proportion of the survivors can be classified as certainly Stuart by their heraldry, but cannot be positively ascribed to a particular sovereign through their lack of dates or initials. It is probable, however, that the great majority of these unidentified examples belong to the reign of Charles II.

Of the various Stuart sovereigns, James I's arms are not common, but as a rule present little difficulty from their resemblance in style and execution to their Elizabethan predecessors. An admirable example, painted on boards and dated 1613, may be seen at East Meon in eastern Hampshire.

Charles I's are rare from the nature of the case : at the end of his reign both political and religious prejudices combined to blot out practically all symbols in churches of that régime which had thrown three nations into war and brought about the death of their king. Very few examples survive : Cox & Harvey quote (*op. cit.*, p. 352) two in Suffolk, at Mellis (1634) and Ashbocking (1640), and one in Cornwall at St. Feock (1638). Cornwall has three more, at Poughill, St. Mylor, and St. Newlyn ; and Furneaux Pelham, Herts, a coat originally set up in 1634. St. Helen's, Bishopsgate in London, has another example, of carved oak ; and another (1634) is at Messing, Essex.

The arms of Charles II survive in much greater numbers, and the majority of dated examples are of the earlier¹ years of his reign, as for example, in Kent the beautiful carved coat of 1660 at Ashford, which at present is all too little seen, set very high up in the north transept and not in its original place. Another fine carved Stuart arms in the little church of Knowlton, near Wingham, probably belongs also to the years soon after the Restoration.

William and Mary occasionally use the ordinary Stuart coat, but much more often with the addition of the Nassau escutcheon of pretence. Anne has two different coats, a reversion to plain Stuart until 1707, and a completely altered one after the Union of England and Scotland. But since

¹ An exception in Kent (now lost) was at Smarden (1677). See *Arch. Cant.*, XIV, 19.

her motto for both is generally *Semper eadem*, there is little likelihood that the average unidentified Stuart arms belongs to her early years.

The only Stuart sovereign now remaining for consideration is the ill-fated James II, whose two attempts to escape his realm from Faversham and Rochester bring him peculiarly into touch with Kent.

His arms are of great rarity, partly from his few and troubled years on the throne, but more probably from the hatred which his misrule had engendered throughout the country. In affairs of state great alarm had spread when men had seen the iron hand of the Crown imprisoning the Seven Bishops and even raising a local furore over the Magdalen election; and this allied to the nation-wide dread of the king's Popery was enough to make most churchwardens eager to supplant James's arms by those of William.

Even in London this rarity holds good: not one of the Wren churches in the City has an undoubted example, though a mace at St. Sepulchre's in Holborn bears James's arms. These occur also on the communion plate at Chelsea Hospital and on a ceiling in its Governor's House, but such appears to be almost the total for the whole metropolis.

In our own county I know of only a single example in a Kentish church other than West Malling, and this is by a curious chance in the rebuilt fabric of North Cray, where on the vestry wall hangs a small Stuart arms of iron, dated 1687, which is possibly only a domestic fire-back in another home.

The West Malling arms have an affinity with those at Westerham not only from their great rarity, but also from their display of uncommon features. They are of carved and painted oak, and hang on the front of the modern organ gallery at the west end of the nave, and it is probable that this part of the building has always been their home. They are fairly high up and are not easy to photograph; the illustration here submitted was taken in July, 1932.

These arms have therefore probably adorned three different naves—the mediæval one demolished in 1780 (when

the chancel narrowly escaped a like fate); its classical successor, which resembled the present rebuilt parish church of Strood; and the modern, and again Gothic nave, completed in 1901.

The only references I have come across to this beautiful piece of late seventeenth century heraldry are contained in a few lines in Lawson and Stockley's history of West Malling church (1904, with contributions from others), p. 47, where it is properly, if sparingly, called "handsome"; and in two more in Fielding's *Records of Rochester* (1910), p. 184, where it is "thought to be a Grinling Gibbons". The plates in this book facing respectively pp. 28 and 48 show the second and third naves, facing west, and the arms hanging in the same place in each on the front of the west gallery; small as is necessarily their compass in a general photograph, it is clear that almost all the damaged detail at present was in the same state before the removal of the Georgian building. The larger windows of the latter threw a stronger light than now on the arms, so that it is hoped that the illustration may serve a useful purpose where the original is frankly somewhat *in tenebris*.

Although this coat is certainly that of James II from its initialling, there is no date upon it, but the narrow limits of his reign anchor it between 1685 and 1688.

The interesting arms of James I in a house in Strand Street in Sandwich (illustrated in the present volume) have been ascribed to James II, in a recent official description of the property, though by remarkable error; the reader is invited to compare the widely different styles of the two coats varying in age by probably about three-quarters of a century. The Sandwich arms are essentially Jacobean and sober in conception; those at West Malling far more in the French and florid manner typical of the ornament in the contemporary Wren additions to Hampton Court. Particularly the uncommon border of ornament round the achievement is in the style of Grinling Gibbon (1648-1720), though it is not suggested that this work is necessarily from his own hand.

The whole composition, which is large, is slightly damaged and is set upon a modern backing of framed boards painted dark green. The missing pieces are the lion statant crest on the crowned helm, the unicorn's horn and that part of the mantling near his head, and a small portion of the floral ornament of the border at its dexter base.

As a work of art of its rather florid period which yet achieves both strength and dignity apart from its fine execution, this piece of carved heraldry deserves a notable place among its Kentish brethren, and should be compared with such examples as Ashford and Knowlton (before quoted), Cranbrook (dated 1756 but possibly earlier), and Woolwich (probably about 1740). The whole design has excellent balance, and perhaps in particular may be singled out the very fine figure of the supporting unicorn.

The circular shield is correctly carved in low relief with the quarterly Stuart bearings which have always better effect than the Hanoverian quarterings succeeding them. The blazon is :

- (1 and 4) Quarterly, modern France (*az. 3 fleurs de lys or.*) and England (*gu. 3 leopards or.*).
- (2) Scotland (*or a lion rampant in a tressure flory counter-flory gu.*).
- (3) Ireland (*az. a harp or stringed ar.*).

The harp is of good design, and a rather early example of having a woman's head and breasts upon its front.¹ Both the Garter legend and the motto (*Dieu et mon droit*) are somewhat obscured by the limbs of the supporting golden

¹ This treatment of the harp, frequently abandoned in present day heraldry, appears not to have become general till somewhere about the year 1700. Two coats of William III have survived at Deal; one, painted and dated 1699, set up in the Town Hall at the incorporation of the borough, has the woman; the other, undated and carved on the west gallery in St. Leonard's church, omits her. In *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica*, I, No. XVIII, plate opp. p. 73, is an engraving of the destroyed monument at Reculver of Ralph Brook, York Herald, d. Oct. 15, 1625. He wears a Stuart tabard and the harp bears the woman, with even the still later wings, not found at West Malling; but as this would be an extremely early instance, and the drawing is not very accurate, the artist has probably merely reproduced in such a detail the convention of his own time (c. 1780).

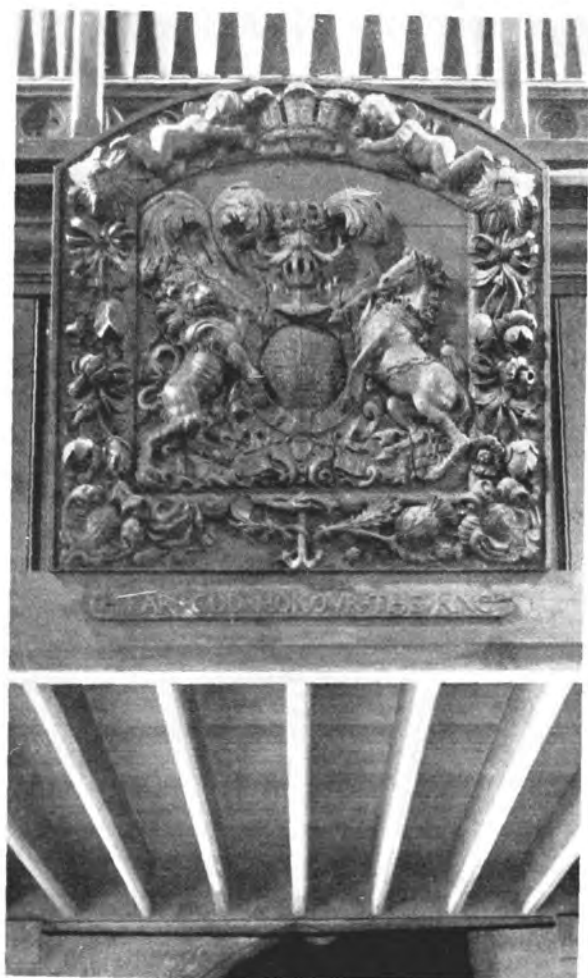


Photo : V. J. Torr.

ARMS OF JAMES II.
West Malling Church.

lion and silver unicorn. As stated, the gold and ermine mantling is damaged on the sinister side, and the lion crest has disappeared.

The uncommon feature of an ornamental border has in itself unusual items of interest. The sides are of flower and ribbon work of like character with that on the pulpit at Meopham, of date 1682 and which came from St. Margaret's, Westminster. At the springs of the segmental top are two Garter star decorations, and the top border is occupied by a panache borne by two naked cherubs. In the bottom border is a central anchor flanked by a rose and its foliage on the dexter, a thistle and its foliage on the sinister. At the two lower corners are diagonally-set cartouches, dexter bearing J R, crowned, sinister R, likewise crowned. The latter R is

II

II

the more ornate and may possibly stand for J R as a combined letter. These letters are in somewhat florid capitals, in contrast to the sober and beautifully cut text in relief below, on a detached slip of oak, unpainted :

FEAR · GOD · HONOUR · THE · KING

The colouring of the whole achievement and border is faded but appears to be the original.

West Malling church having passed through several vicissitudes, it is earnestly hoped that a watchful eye will henceforth be kept on this extremely handsome and interesting ornament, precious both for its rarity, uncommon features, and beautiful design and craftsmanship ; perhaps the more so as this church's famous possession, the West Malling Elizabethan Jug, was sold in 1903, from the proceeds whereof the present north porch was built and various church works effected.

GEORGIAN FONT.

In conclusion it may be noted that at the west end of the south aisle, near to both the arms and the Victorian font, is its eighteenth century predecessor, discarded but preserved, being a member of a small family in Kent still

existing additionally to those lost examples of which there is now only descriptive or pictorial record. Perhaps the finest font of this late group is that at St. Peter's in Thanet (1749, not 1746 as given by Cozens); and one with larger bowl is at New Romney. Otterden can show an almost unique design—a small marble bowl on open iron stand with long drainpipe. The Georgian font at Dartford was lately rescued from a garden. Others are at Ash-next-Sandwich, St. James's old church in Dover, and elsewhere.