

MEMORIAL TO LADY AUSTEN IN BEXLEY CHURCH

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The hatchment erected in memory of Lady Austen is in a category of its own and appears to be unique.¹ Although described as an achievement, it is not perhaps strictly a hatchment as it was unlikely to have been carried at a funeral, and, being suspended by rope like a hatchment, not quite like a memorial monument normally permanently fixed to a wall. It is a hybrid between the two. It is made of metal and engraved on the back:

Children of Lady Austen etc.

Elizabeth Lady Austen was 3rd Daughter of Coll. George Stawell and Ursula Austen elder branch of the Stawells of Sommersetshire.

This Atchievement was sett up in memory of Ye Lady Austen who died Nov^r. 18^t 1725 by Wm. Winde Esq. her Ladyship's 2^d Husband

Anno Dom MDCCXXVII.

Haacus Russell Lond. mi fecit.

The engraved work is surrounded completely by green paint.

The hatchment was presumably made and erected about two years after her death, so could not have been carried at the funeral as was the usual practice. The heraldic material on the front is a blaze of colour and is described in detail in '*Hatchments in Britain*' Vol. V. The families represented are Winde of Norfolk, Winde of Northumberland, Bridgman, Stawell, Stratton, Columbers, Gascelyn, Merton, Faraway alias Farewell, Preston, Beaupere, St. Maur, Hext, and three others unidentified. The general design of the painting is not in the traditional style of an heraldic achievement.

Lady Austen was the widow of Sir Robert Austen, the third

¹ Personal communications, Mr Peter Summers and Mr John Titterton, Editors of *Hatchments In Britain*.

baronet, who died in 1706 leaving his eldest son Robert, the fourth baronet, then aged eight, to inherit Hall Place, Bexley. This Sir Robert married in 1738 Rachel Dashwood, sister of Sir Francis Dashwood, a Chancellor of the Exchequer, and founder of the 'Monks' of Medmenham. Sir Robert died at Bath in 1743.² In 1988, the original Marriage Settlement deed, dated 27th April, 1716, between Lady Austen and Mr Winde was brought to Hall Place (now headquarters of the Bexley London Borough Libraries and Museums Service) by Sandra Schumacher of San Francisco who bought the deed by chance with some others from a dealer in Los Angeles. On a visit to England she traced Hall Place and the deed is now part of the Local Studies collection there. Lady Austen is described as 'Jane Elizabeth Austen of Hall Place, Bexley, widow' and her intended husband 'William Winde of St. James in the Liberty of Westminster.' The deed recites that Lady Austen was possessed of great personal estate, i.e. jewellery, plate, ready money, books, pictures, etc., and this was conveyed to Trustees, Robert Austen of Tenterden and George Tooke of the parish of St. Andrew in London, to be held for her benefit. She owned farm stock at Hall Place.

There is no record of the marriage in the Bexley Parish Registers and research into London and Canterbury Licences and some of the many Harleian Society transcripts of London Parish registers in the K.A.S. Library has been unrewarding.

Mr Winde was a Norfolk gentleman, the last of his race. He lived in Germany for many years in attendance upon the Electress Sophia, Princess Palatine, mother of King George I. After the death of the Electress in 1714, he returned to England. He lived until 1742, having been a Commissioner of the Salt Duties from October 25th, 1727.³

The funeral of Lady Austen took place at Bexley on 1st December, 1725, but there is no record of Mr Winde's death there or any gravestone or other memorial known.

Lady Austen and her second husband may have lived at Bexley during their married life. In a Lease dated 25th March, 1727,⁴ Mr Winde is described as of the Parish of St. James, but Mon Plasir (later Halcot) and several fields in Bexley are mentioned as formerly occupied by him. Halcot was more or less opposite Hall Place and part of the Austen estate.

As to the manufacture of the metal hatchment, if 'Haacus' is 'Henry', there was a Henry Russell at 'Spur Alley, passage out of

² *Hall Place, Bexley* P.E. Morris, Bexley Library Service.

³ Canon Scott Robertson's paper on Bexley Church in *Arch. Cant.*, xviii (1889).

⁴ Local Studies, Hall Place L.54.1.

Strand, house of Henry Russell 1720' (no occupation given). There was also 'Israel Russell' at no. 12 Grosvenor Street, painter and stainer, in 1723 and New Burlington Street 1735-38, and 'Henry Russell painter 1761-63 (for Earl of Northampton) Grosvenor Square'.⁵

An interesting possibility is that Russell was a bell-founder and/or clock-maker, and so as a metal-worker could have made the hatchment. There was a Russell family at Wootton, Beds., of this trade in the eighteenth century. One of them, Henry, cast a bell in 1714 at Arlesey. Very little is known of him, so he could have moved to Spur Alley in London and worked there.⁶

The construction of the hatchment poses some questions; the painting is directly on to metal, which covered in paint on both sides cannot be seen adequately. However, from the occasional bright gleam through the scars in the paint on the heraldic side (understood to have been caused recently by ladders) it could be zinc, though at times suggested to be copper. It is surrounded by a wooden frame of more recent date, this backed by metal (*quaere* tin plate) and fastened by metal studs. It is not certain whether the metal is one sheet or two thin ones held together. Regrettably, it was not feasible for a few milligrams to be removed from both sides for examination by a qualified metallurgist, which might have resolved a few problems. The general impression to most members and others who have seen it is that more than one person could have been involved, and the heraldic painting could well be of later date than the engraving on the back. Possibly the heraldic painting was done by a sign writer. The style is similar in some ways to an inn sign. It is noted that the heraldic side follows the usual diamond shape of a hatchment, but the engraved side is treated as a square.

The earliest written reference to it seems to be in the 1880s in *Arch. Cant.*, xviii (1889). There, also, two hatchments to the Winde family in Bexley Church are mentioned, and are visible in an illustration. How these came to be in the church is unknown, as is their location after the restoration of the building in 1882/3.

Apart from the Austen/Winde marriage, there is no apparent local connection with the Windes of Norfolk. There was a Winde family in Bexley in the late sixteenth century.⁷

⁵ Per notes given by Dr C.W. Chalklin extracted from *Survey of London*.

⁶ Personal communication Mr David H. Kennett, and his paper in *Bedfordshire Archaeological Journal*, 10 (1975). In the absence of the Wootton parish register, relationships in the Russell family are uncertain.

⁷ Bexley Parish Registers 1580-96.

The interest and comments of many K.A.S. members and museum curators have been most constructive, and I should particularly like to thank Miss F.I. Oxley (also a member of the Heraldry Society) and Mr G.E.H. Mabbs, Chairman of the Friends of St. Mary's, Bexley, for his assistance with photography.

PLATE I



(Photo.: G.E.H. Mabbs)

Lady Austen's hatchment, Bexley Church.



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Lady Austen's hatchment, Bexley Church.