

## SIXTEENTH CENTURY STAINED GLASS FROM THE RYCOTE CHAPEL, OXFORDSHIRE

Rycote Chapel lies just off the Thame-Wallingford Road approximately 2½ miles from Thame. It was originally the private chapel of a great house which was burnt out in 1745 and finally pulled down in 1800 although surviving remains were converted into the present house in 1911 by Mr. William Weir acting for Lieutenant-Colonel A. St. George Hamersley who had bought the property. The Chapel was placed in the guardianship of the Ministry of Works in 1952 by the then owner, Mr. M. G. A. C. Michaelis (1).

The glass is said to have been found beneath a pile of rubble in the Chapel by the foreman employed by Colonel Hamersley during restoration work in the 1920s. Subsequently it passed through several hands until ultimately Mrs. Harker presented the glass to the Department of the Environment in 1972 with the request that it should be displayed in the Chapel. To this end the glass was passed to the Ancient Monuments Laboratory for conservation, restoration and study.

When the glass was received for conservation it was in a number of fragments stuck to a glass backing plate and framed with lead strip. The fragments were removed from the plate by soaking in warm acetone and the rough edges of each piece were ground with a dental drill. Epoxy resin was used as the adhesive in the reassembly which was skilfully undertaken by Mr. Michael Lassens. He also used epoxy resin mixed with powder colours to effect minor repairs to the painted design. During this work the fragments were mounted on a glass plate faced with "cling foil", a technique which permitted easy removal of the reconstructed panel when reassembly was completed.

The painted design comprises a group of three figures. To the right is a richly dressed woman wearing a purple gown with green sleeves, white ruff and brown fur-trimmed mantle with wide split sleeves.

She holds a fan in her left hand along with a pomander. A money bag hangs from her right wrist. To the left is part of a male figure with ruff, purple mantle and blue doublet. The hands of the two figures are clasped. In the centre is a third figure wearing a white coif but otherwise naked. It has the legs of a hoofed animal (one hoof shows signs of an earlier repair with a fragment of coloured glass) and evidently is a devil. A stream of coins is issuing from the mouth and a claw-like hand rests on the woman's wrist.

This design is almost identical with an engraving "Marriage for Personal Gain" (2) <sup>after a painting</sup> ~~undertaken~~ by Hendrick Goltzius who worked at Haarlem from 1582 onwards and this engraving <sup>presumably</sup> ~~was~~ served as a model for the glass painting. Goltzius is also known to have executed a companion <sup>Design</sup> ~~engraving~~, "Marriage for Love" (3), so it can be <sup>conjectured</sup> ~~anticipated~~ that originally there would have been at least a pair of glass panels at Rycote. In fact, there may well have been three because <sup>the</sup> ~~another~~ engraver, Jean Saenredam, is known to have engraved a suite of three on the same subject ("Les Trois Sortes de Mariage"), the third representing marriage based on "pure and chaste love, and which is blessed by Jesus Christ" (4). As it was usual at this period for a particular thematic group (in this case "The Three Sorts of Marriage"; another was the "Seven Deadly Sins") to be used as a subject by a number of different engravers, it is possible that Goltzius also <sup>designed</sup> ~~engraved~~ a complete suite on the marriage theme.

Three questions are left to be answered:

Hendrick

- (a) did <sup>the painting on which the</sup> Goltzius paint the glass as well as engraving ~~what~~ <sup>appears to be the model</sup> is based.
- (b) in view of the theme would the glass have hung in the Rycote Chapel; and
- (c) how did the glass come to be at Rycote?

It is possible to supply tentative answers to these questions.

It is known that Goltzius's father was a glass painter as he is so described in Karel van Mander's Life of Goltzius (5) and that his nephew, Jan, had a glass painting workshop at Haarlem (6). Thus, although it cannot be established that Heinrich Goltzius painted the glass, the possibility exists that it would have been painted in a workshop operated by a member of his family. Mr Michael Archer of the Victoria & Albert Museum has confirmed that, in his opinion, the glass is Flemish (although not necessarily Haarlem work) of late 16th/early 17th century date. He doubts, however, that an engraver of ~~Heinrich's calibre would also have painted glass.~~ Mr Archer has also suggested that it would seem unlikely that glass of a secular kind would have been displayed in the Chapel and would have more likely hung in front of windows in the house. However, if the third subject (Marriage ..... blessed by Jesus Christ) was represented, the whole group might then have been suitable for exhibition in a church.

The final question, how did the glass come to be at Rycote, can only lead to a highly speculative answer. If its arrival was broadly contemporary with its painting then the connection between Rycote and Flanders may be through one of the sons of Baron Norreys of Rycote who was serving in Flanders in 1592. We know of this Flanders connection because in September 1592 Queen Elizabeth was paying the last of several visits to Rycote to stay with the Norreyses and it is recorded that while there she received four letters, one from Ireland, another from Flanders and two from Brittany, each accompanied by some valuable little gift (7). These were from the four Norreys sons serving abroad and one can thus speculate that the glass which is the subject of the present Note may have found its way to Rycote in the same manner by the hand of one of the Norreys sons.

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# NOTES

1. J. Salmon, Rycote Chapel, Oxfordshire, H.M.S.O., 1967 (Official Guide-Book).

2. G. Hirth, Kulturgeschichtliches Bilderbuch aus Vier Jahrhunderten

Vol. I, 1923. G. Hirths Verlag, Munchen. <sup>Plate</sup> ~~Engraving~~ 292. This is signed H. Goltzius invenit. J. Saenredam sculpt., and is inscribed, "Divitiae turpes, et quos opulentiae iungit falluntur misere vafro cacodemonis astu", which may be translated as, "Those whom sordid riches and affluence unite (in marriage) are miserably deceived by the crafty subtlety of the devil" or "cacodemonis" may be "cacodemoni" - spirit of evil.

3. Hirth, ibid, Engraving 291. This is inscribed, "Confugium quod turpis amor, fedusque cupido copulat, instabile est, et mox peritura voluptas" and can be translated as "The marriage which is joined by sordid love and filthy lust is unstable, and (carnal) pleasure will soon die" if "fedus" is taken as "foedus" and "cupido" taken as lust, not the boy "Cupid".

4. A. Bartsch, Le Peintre Graveur, Vol. III, 246. Jean Saenredam,

Engravings — Nos. 84-86. "Les trois sortes de mariage. Suite de trois estampes

1. Le Mariage qui se fait dans le seule vue de plaisir, et auquel préside l'Amour ...

2. Celui dont le principal motif sont les richesses, et qui est l'ouvrage du demon

3. Celui qui ne se contracte que par un principe d'amour pur et chaste, et qui est béni par Jesus Christ. Quos connectit amor verus ..."

We are indebted to Mr. Reginald Williams of the British Museum for his location of these engravings.

5. Schilderboek, Amsterdam 1618. f. 196 b

6. Thieme-Becker, Lexikon Allgemeines Lexikon der bildenden Künstler. Vol. XIV. p. 349

7. J. Salmon op cit.