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Appendix V The Apethorpe Window

Stephanie Brooke
Independent Researcher

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Appendix V

THE APETHORPE WINDOW

"Our Lord Jesus Christ dyed to kill sinne in us. And he hath risen again from the grave, to rayse us up from sinne."¹



St. Leonard's Apethorpe contains not only the massive tomb of Sir Anthony and Lady Grace Mildmay (probably by Maximilian Colt who sculpted the tomb of Elizabeth I), but a window commissioned by the devout Lady Grace just before her death in 1620 generally agreed to be by Holborn based artist and glazier Baptista Sutton².

The window has a typological theme drawing on both the Old and New Testaments, and the left hand light depicts Adam and Eve and their temptation by the serpent. The pronounced S shape of the serpent, the fact that Adam is bearded, and the particular flowers chosen – marigolds and red roses, one of them recognisably "Tudor" in form – recall the imagery of the headboard of the

¹ Lady Grace Mildmay *Meditations* Part II, fols. 42-47.

² See: Clare Tilbury "Grace Mildmay and the painted glass window in the Mildmay Chapel at St Leonard's church, Apethorpe, Northamptonshire" *The Seventeenth Century*, May 2017 (Routledge); and Geoffrey Lane "Glass Sundial Makers of 17th Century London" in *The Journal of Stained Glass*, 2006; and Graham Parry *Glory, Laud and Honour: The Arts of the Anglican Counter-Reformation* (Boydell Press, 2016). Sutton's competitors Bernard van Linge and especially his son Abraham van Linge (whose style has most similarities) did not arrive in England until late 1621 and 1623, respectively.

royal marriage bed. It may be said that this Adam and Eve are influenced rather by the frontispiece of the Biblical Genealogies which John Speed obtained a royal licence to have included with editions of the new Authorised Version of the Bible produced from 1611 onwards, with which Grace Mildmay would be very familiar.



However.

Lady Grace habitually used the previous Geneva Bible all her adult life, rather than the more recent version.

Speed's frontispiece has no flowers in the smaller version, and only generalised ones beneath the Tree in the larger.

Speed's Adam is noticeably less hirsute.

Speed's snake does not follow such a pronounced curve (although the window snake is moving in the opposite direction).

Speed does not make a feature of the Seven Stars, present at the top of the window and on the headboard and footboard of the royal bed representing the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit or the Cardinal and Theological Virtues, also a feature of the marriage pageants of Arthur Tudor and Catherine of Aragon.



And Speed's design does not use the Gothic script of the royal bed's banderole inscription, which – unlike in his other designs for example for St Mary's Little Easton and Abbot's Hospital Guildford, which use Roman script throughout – Sutton uses only for this window in the banderoles, with text divided by diamond stops as in printed text by eg. Caxton a century and more before.



Also in this window, unlike at Little Easton, Sutton depicts the risen Christ treading on the Devil and a serpent instead of floating triumphantly into the empyrean.

This may all show some acquaintance with the royal marriage bed by Lady Grace, who was a good amateur artist and may well have sketched out the design. Her chief interests were the Bible and royal history and genealogy. An idea that the Apethorpe Adam and Eve bear a vague resemblance to James I and Anna of Denmark though should probably be rejected .. or should it ?

Lady Grace had a close relationship with her like-minded father-in-law, Sir Walter Mildmay, a steady and reliable Tudor court official who Elizabeth Instantly installed as her first Chancellor of the Exchequer. He had also previously been one of the three officials appointed to draw up the inventory of the Goods of Henry VIII after the king's death. He was a member of the close, intermarried circle of the Denny, Gates, Walsingham and Mildmay families who were very much in control of the late king's belongings and finances for the year following his death; brothers-in-law Sir Anthony Denny and Sir John Gates had also been in control of the dry stamp of Henry VIII's signature for the last eighteen months of his life. Gates then supervised the stock take at Windsor for the 1547 Inventory.

This court circle would be familiar with the headboard of the royal bed if it was still assembled in a royal palace in this decade. They were also very Protestant - Sir John Gates was executed with Northumberland by Mary I – and so would have been likely to have had the inscription cut into the headboard banderoles with the approval of the young Edward VI if it was done at this time; it may now have been displayed with approbation rather than covered with a heraldic fabric tester (which would likely have been the case again under Mary I).

Sir Walter Mildmay was allowed to purchase Apethorpe House (which on paper belonged to the Princess Elizabeth) in 1552, and entertained Elizabeth I there as Queen in 1566, having successfully negotiated his passage through the previous reign. In the days of Sir Anthony and Lady Grace Mildmay it was a favourite resort of James I, who reputedly first met George Villiers there in 1614.



Above: the risen Christ in a window by Baptista Sutton at St Mary's Little Easton
Right: Christ in the Apethorpe window tramples on the Devil with one foot while standing on a globe with the other, overcoming Evil and Death



Over her lifetime Lady Grace compiled a volume of spiritual meditations to give to her daughter Mary and her grandchildren as a guide to living a godly life, which convey her preoccupation with sinfulness, redemption and resurrection only through faith in the saving grace of Christ. Both she and her husband express their sense of grievous sins, which they believed could be forgiven through “the onlie merittes of the death and passion of my lord and saviour Jesus Christ and by no other help or means whatsoever” and “make us both partakers with himself of a joyful resurrection at the last daye.”³ The design and subjects of the window are treated in an old-fashioned and idiosyncratic way to reflect her preoccupations; compare Sutton’s more conventional portrayal of the Crucifixion and Resurrection at St Mary’s Little Easton and Lincoln College Chapel, Oxford. Marigolds would be a strange choice of flower for a Protestant woman as they were associated with the Virgin, unless for her the association with a royal artefact was important.

If the marriage bed of 1486 had left London at the turn of the century, by the time of the commission of the St Leonard’s East Window Lady Grace would not have seen the actual bed for at least twenty years, but a memory of it (and possibly an earlier sketch) and its theme of salvation could credibly have influenced the window’s design.

³ Lady Grace Mildmay *Meditations* Part I, fols. 78-9.