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Conclusions

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CONCLUSIONS



In following the trail of an extraordinary artefact through history it has become clear that it is necessary to be completely interdisciplinary in approach to avoid misconceptions and errors, to assess adequately what it ought to be if it were made in 1485/86 and see it with contemporary eyes. It is necessary to look at how great beds were previously used by the English royal court and the precise location of this one, which explains why some beds were very much larger, but not the marriage bed. It is necessary to be aware of the prevailing styles of carving and heraldic display, and how to distinguish these from either fanciful late 18th century Gothick or more massive Victorian Gothic revival, or Morris Romantic. It is necessary to be aware of the abundance of evidence in late medieval manuscripts and paintings and tapestries of both furniture style and the religious viewpoint and iconography of the late 15th century. And it is necessary to use all the help available from modern science but at the same time, to guide that by using your eyes and all the available information.

The bed was clearly carved by master craftsmen in an unsophisticated style not yet influenced by the Renaissance as regards either ornament or *physique du corps*, but is none the less far superior to the abilities of whoever carved the “Percy” bed for George Shaw or the heraldic lions on the other Warkworth pieces (the mechanically achieved reproduction of the brattishing friezes and any generic ecclesiastical style “Gothic” detail is good, but carving either a woman or small animals freehand was beyond the Shaw workshop of 1847/8). Shaw always copied, and any theory he would spontaneously conceive the design theme of Adam and Eve in Paradise for a headboard without seeing existing carved work to inspire him is unlikely. Even less likely would be inserting elements not present in the Speed addition to the Authorised Version, such as the cross fleury from which the Tree of Life grows, the symbolic flowers next to its trunk, and the stance of the two protagonists who do not both have a hand on their breast making a pledge. To Shaw the cross was merely a decorative motif, and so used it for somewhere to put “eate” when he ran out of room. A more skilled carver directed by Pugin would have done better, but used more finesse and Victorian machinery. The bed presents

Above: the Emperor Vespasian, ill with leprosy, is greeted by his son Titus on BL Add. MS 89066/1 f.61v *Le Mystère de la Vengeance de Nostre Seigneur Ihesu Crist* (Bruges c.1465). The Emperor’s bed has a footboard which is mostly obscured by the counterpane which is thrown over it (see the early C16th bed in the “Waldegrave room”, Hever Castle, where the cover has slits so that this can still be done on a bed with four posts).

layers of history: traces of credibly late medieval paint, loss, repairs and worm captured beneath Shaw’s sooty varnish, evidence beyond the remit or technique of a Victorian forger to manufacture even with a collection of 16th and 17th century carved woodwork.

To disregard or overlook any of this and examine the 1486 bed only as a piece of furniture or even a carver’s *chef d’oeuvre* can result in

alarming errors. Fortunately though an exact dendro match is elusive, DNA tracing by the same team that worked on the *Mary Rose* has now conclusively proved that the oak of the bed is definitely European haplotype 7 and probably derives from Germany or the Baltic, which provided the slow growing, tight grained oak from which English monarchs often sourced timber for their furniture (the surviving iron screws of the lion finials, which stylistically have a Germanic look, may well have come from Nuremberg, famous for its metalwork).¹

The medieval story of the Roman emperor Vespasian being cured of leprosy (and possibly more bizarrely, wasps in the nose) by Veronica's Veil on manuscripts and a tapestry has played an unexpected part in this story, as they provide important contemporary evidence both for the exact form of the diapered posts of the marriage bed and also that elite beds often had a footboard; but as it was usually fairly plain and an embroidered counterpane more interesting, the latter was often thrown over the footboard. A bed in its uniform of the quartered royal arms of England, however, had to display all its additional messages via its carved woodwork.

It is a pity no records² have yet been unearthed regarding the craftsmen who actually made the bed; the faces of the lions and their iron screws suggest some German input³, but the royal workshop at Westminster may have still employed many of the joiners and carvers who had been working at St George's Chapel for Edward IV under William Barclay. It seems most likely that this bed - quite probably the last designed to fit this particular semi-sacred space before the bed enclosure was dismantled to allow for a larger bed with its own drapes - never travelled about the country at all, but only between London palaces and indeed between parts of Westminster and Whitehall, until probably going to Windsor Castle in 1547/8.⁴

As well as a precise dendrochronological match there are of course a number of questions unresolved at the time of writing, some of which may benefit from more tunnelling in archives or wider press coverage, for example;

When did the Dearden family acquire the Thomas Stanley bed, and how authentic was its appearance in 1913 ?

Did any writer still unknown to us record the appearance of the Queen's Gift either when it was bestowed or in the 18th or 19th centuries ?

How much of the original paint was left on the bed when encountered by George Shaw ? Had it already been stripped say, at the end of the 17th century, when it would have been unfashionable ? Did Shaw perceive it was older than the reign of Elizabeth without supporters to the royal arms as a guide ?

Might the matching wainscot posts discovered in 2014 have come from the bed enclosure, half boarded round as for Henry III, to make it less draughty ?

Where did antiques dealer Eric Davidson find the bed after its use in film and television ? Which prop company did the BBC hire it from for *Pride and Prejudice* and, thinks Julia Sawalha, also *Martin Chuzzlewit* ?

Are there any surviving sketchbooks by George Shaw lurking in an attic which include his drawings of the bed which inspired his fraudulent furniture ?

¹ The scientific reports on the woodwork and the traces of original late medieval paint trapped beneath George Shaw's varnish (as was old woodworm) will be published in a volume about the physical aspects of the bed forthcoming from Oxbow Books, also featuring many of Ian Coulson's high resolution photographs of details of the joinery, repairs and decay, and Helen Hughes' extraordinary captures of the surviving original paint.

² Many records for 1485-6 are not extant, and may unfortunately have perished in the Ashburnham House Cotton Library fire of 23rd October 1731.

³ In the very messy surviving accounts for the makeover of the Coldharbour for Margaret Beaufort in autumn 1485, one (out of five) joiners named supplying functional furniture is a Thomas Stokhaus; there is also glass supplied by a Herman Glayser. Most of the craftsmen seem to come from the immediate vicinity of the Coldharbour, and in London would of course include craftsmen from the continent (see Charles L. Kingsford, *Some London Houses of the Early Tudor Period*, *Archaeologia* Vol 71, pp.17-54 (London, Society of Antiquaries, 1921).

⁴ Records for Edward III for 1363-6 include a payment of 2s 8d to Henry Clerc for the carriage of one of the king's beds "unius lecti regis" from Windsor back to Westminster after much construction work. On 7th October 1502 at Minster Lovell, the bed Elizabeth of York had used on her progress so far had fallen apart, and her Yeoman of the Beds William Hamerton was paid 20s "for making a new bedstedde for the queen" (TNA E36/210 f.56). Was this mostly a simple functional construction to enable the display of the emblematic hangings (which were carefully folded into huge leather bags) ?

Did Dr John Dee, who visited Hough End when new in 1596 and possibly lived at both Chetham's College and the Stanley/Mosley Alport Lodge, have any part in the story ?

Also noticeable is the recurrent appearance of James Stanley Bishop of Ely, Thomas 1st Earl of Derby's tallest son and unlikely ecclesiastic, who hosted the royal party at Winwick in 1495 before they moved on to Lathom, who was Warden of Manchester College and lived at both Chetham's and Alport Lodge, whose coat of arms appears on the Middleton pulpit thanks to George Shaw's recycling of salvaged woodwork, and whose former chancel at Winwick was improved by Pugin in 1848.

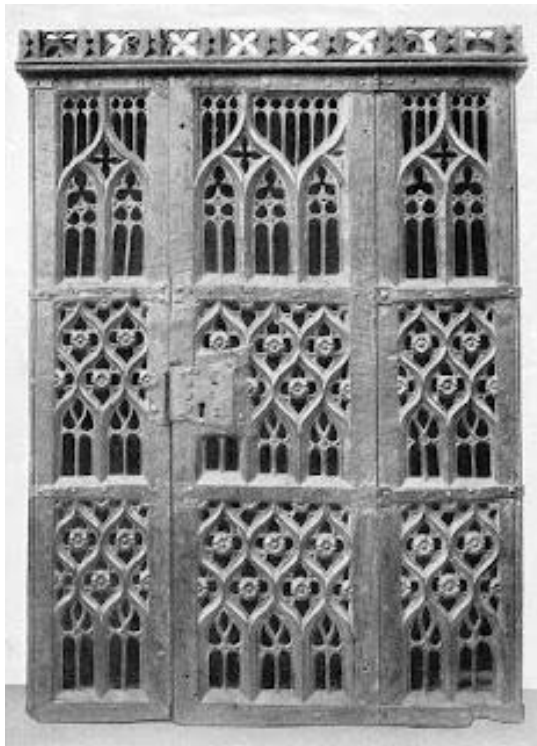
Victorian England seems to have been a hive of antiquarian and commercial Gothic Revival activity for the ten years following the Strawberry Hill contents sale in April 1842, and it is astonishing how quickly enthusiasts for old buildings and furniture and salvaged spolia managed to move around the country in an age before the motor car, on the nascent railways or by coach. Shaw does not seem to have attended the sale of Walpole's collection but his letters to Raines show that he was in London that June. We know from his sketchbooks that he had visited the Henry VII Chapel and Hampton Court; surely at some stage he paid a visit to the Museum of Medieval Art of L.N. Cottingham (1787-1847) at 43 Waterloo Bridge Road before its extensive collection of furniture and architectural fragments was sadly sold off and dispersed in 1850, despite the advocacy of (the unrelated) antiquarian and artist Henry Shaw.

St Veronica is prompted by the angel Uriel to visit Vespasian in Spain and the sight of the Holy Veil cures him instantly (as with the above miniature, by Loyset Liédet: BL Add. MS 89066/1); again, the counterpane is thrown over the footboard



Below: there are still roses and daisies in the marriage contract of Mary Tudor and Henry Duke of Orléans (later Henry II), signed on 18th August 1527 in conjunction with the Treaty of Amiens





Two German late 15th century oak ventilated wall cupboards or Hängeschränkchen, left: one in the catalogue of the Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Köln, which displays the softened ogee lozenge enclosing a flower seen in the Henry VII Chapel woodwork and on the “Thomas Stanley” bed

Below: one lost in the Schlossmuseum, Berlin during WWII bombing; note the shield hanging on a strap amongst foliage enclosed within a vine



The Shaw bed sold at Sotheby's on 14th September 2005 still had a roof, its oak tester – as did his Alnwick Castle/Syon House bed before its front posts were shortened; how, if the royal bed were one of his designs and a product of Victorian antiquarian commerce made relatively recently, would it have kept its posts but lost its tester? It is fortunate that he also preserved the “Jacobite” arms with its dendrochronologically certified date which proves that the royal bed must be pre 1710

And of course - when, exactly, was the *I Corinthians* inscription cut into the banderole ?

If only the decorating company which photographed many of the rooms of Rolleston Hall in 1892 had included a picture of the Mosleys' prize possession, we might have had definite, unarguable proof that The Queen's Gift was indeed the royal marriage bed of 1486; but their services would not be required for that room, so they did not. However, what remains is an overwhelming accumulation of circumstantial evidence; the bed is always in the right place at the right time to survive political upheaval yet remain relatively unnoticed and survive into the present day.

It has Category A Jacobite associations to explain the updated achievement with its concrete dendrochronological date (proving that the bed has to be older) and East Midlands oak. The absence of both sets of royal arms from the bed as it was at the hotel in Chester and the subsequent auction is explained by the entry into the story of George Shaw, who purloined them while doing work for Rolleston Hall (and how they became separated in the first place is explained by the newspaper account of the young Sir Oswald 2nd Bt's rescue of them from Ancoats Hall in the early 19th century).

If it had been possible to fill in the gap between the Mosleys and *Carry On Dick* with another newspaper account with, this time, a photograph, this theory - for of course though exhaustively researched it remains, for now, a theory - would have been conclusively proved. Perhaps before long the final piece of the puzzle will come to light.

For me, the eyes always had it . . .



Medieval eyes.

Stephanie Brooke

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