

St Mary's Church Receives an Important Parcel

“So What's a Hatchment?”

On a fine sunny October day in 2004, the door bell went, and it was a genial man with a grey beard carrying a large rolled parcel. “Here's the hatchment” he said, and I looked puzzled. The man turned out to be Dr. Andrew Gray a heraldic scholar, employed by the Council for the Care of Churches to find and restore to the appropriate church any hatchments he could find anywhere in England. What is a hatchment, I wanted to know?

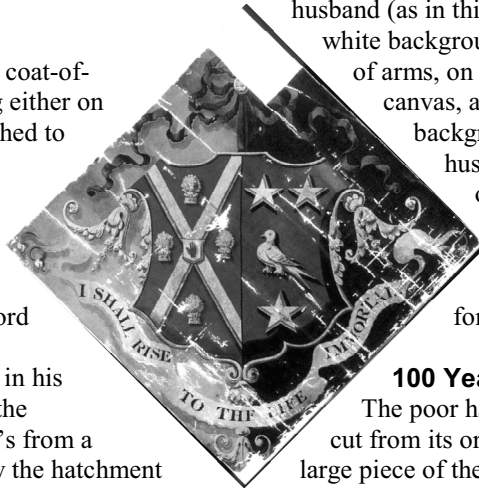
Up in the Attic

Well, I learned it is a coat-of-arms funeral painting either on wood or canvas attached to a diamond shaped wooden frame. Dr. Gray found this hatchment rolled up in the attic of the antique shop in Burford owned by Mr. Roger Warner, a gentleman in his 90's, who took over the premises in the 1930's from a funeral director. How the hatchment happened to end up there is anyone's guess, but it is likely that it had been in that attic for over 100 years! The Reade Family owned Shipton Court for over two hundred years in the 18th & 19th Centuries and there is a Reade family chapel within St. Mary's Church in Shipton. The hatchment contains the coats-of-arms of both the Reade family and the Murray family. Louisa Murray Reade was the wife of Sir John Chandos Reade, 6th Baron of Shipton Court. She was married on 6th January 1814 and died in childbirth, seven years later on 6th

February 1821 after giving birth to five children.

The hatchment would have been positioned for some months in front of the house of the deceased person, and was then supposed to have been brought into the church. The words “I shall rise to the life immortal” which are painted along the bottom, are not the family motto, but a hopeful statement of belief.

A married woman who died before her husband (as in this case) would have a white background behind her coat of arms, on the left of the canvas, and a black background behind her husband's coat of arms on the right. Hatchment paintings adhered to rigid rules of form and style.

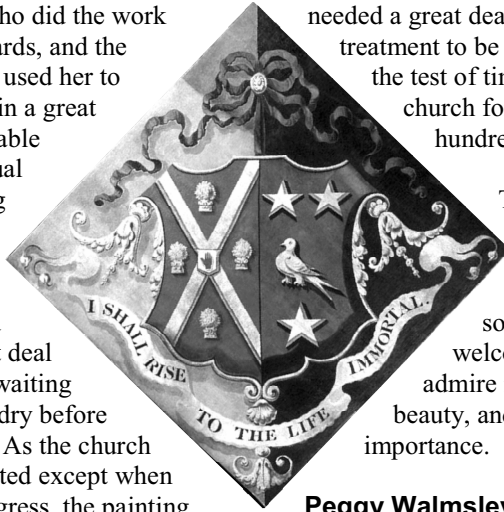


100 Years of Dust!

The poor hatchment had been cut from its original frame, and a large piece of the top corner cut away. It testified to its long attic resting place by bringing with it at least 100 years of dust! The time consuming process of finding a person to restore the painting, and getting the funding to pay for it began in November 2004. Little by little pledges of money came through. Oxfordshire Historic Churches Trust pledged some money, and additional funds came from the Council for the Care of Churches. Sir John Smith, who remembered Shipton Court as a place where he played as a boy, pledged £2,200. The church put up some money too.

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The conservator who did the work has won many awards, and the National Trust has used her to restore and maintain a great many of their valuable paintings. The actual process of cleaning and restoration is long and quite technical, many chemicals are used and there is a great deal of time expended waiting for one process to dry before another can begin. As the church is damp and unheated except when services are in progress, the painting



needed a great deal of protective treatment to be sure it would stand the test of time hanging in the church for the next several hundred years.

The hatchment will be hung in the Reade Chapel of St. Mary's Church soon, and all are welcome to come and admire its outstanding beauty, and historical importance.

Peggy Walmsley

Fifield and Idbury News

The Times They are A-Changin'

It was Bob Dylan who wrote *The times they are a-changin'* and the Cotswolds haven't escaped the march of time. Better communications, new technology and changing work practices have all added to the change. Villages that once depended on sheep farming and the rural economy, with a population to match, are now home to a greater variety of residents and visitors, many looking for a rural idyll that sometimes seems at odds with modern life.

But all is not lost, and some local traditions prevail. One of these is the traditional fete which provides a focus for many villages and entertainment for residents and visitors alike. Anabel and I were welcomed as new arrivals to Fifield just over a year ago and have become actively involved in village life including, almost inevitably, the annual **Fifield and Idbury Fete**. The village is easily accessible from the

Burford-Stow road but, with no through traffic and almost entirely traditional buildings, it makes an ideal venue, enhanced by the new bunting produced at several evening sewing parties. The whole village seemed to be involved on the day, with both traditional and more unusual stalls and events.

This year's fete, to be held at Fifield recreation ground on **Saturday 27th May**, looks set to be even better. There will be a dozen or so stalls and lots of games and competitions, and we are fortunate to be entertained by a Barber's Shop Quartet and the Hullabaloo folk band, both with links with the village. The bar will be provided by resident Archie Orr-Ewing, of the legendary Kings Head in Bledington, plus teas and coffees and a 'gourmet' barbecue - that will be our job for the day. I'm really looking forward to it!
Jonathan Scott- Smith