

I.

A MURAL PAINTING AND A CARVED DOOR AT TRAQUAIR HOUSE, INNERLEITHEN. BY G. P. H. WATSON, F.R.I.B.A., F.S.A.Scot., AND A. GRAHAM, F.S.A.Scot., F.S.A.

Read January 31, 1942.

It is now generally recognised that mural painting was a form of art extensively practised in mediæval Britain. Broadly speaking, its use in churches, both as a medium for instruction and as a decoration, went out with the Reformation; but it continued to be employed in secular buildings until superseded by other types of wall-covering such as tapestry, panelling, and finally wall-paper. Despite all the destruction that has taken place, England still possesses nearly a thousand mediæval mural paintings. Very few, however, have been recorded in Scotland, although the art was evidently practised here at an early time—Barbour, for example, tells us that St Margaret caused a picture to be painted for her chapel in Edinburgh Castle,¹ while traces of such paintings can still be seen in the abbey churches of Dunfermline, Inchcolm, and Culross, Dunkeld Cathedral, Pluscarden Priory, and elsewhere. In secular buildings the most important series of murals are those at Kinneil House, so admirably described by Mr J. S. Richardson, F.S.A.Scot., in the last volume of the *Proceedings*. In the present paper we draw attention to a contemporary mural at Traquair House, near Innerleithen, which is little known and has not hitherto been recorded in detail.

This painting is in a room on the second floor at the north-west end of the main block. This end is generally held to be the oldest part of the house, but it may prove on close examination to be an extension from an older tower on the south-east. Be that as it may, the part containing the mural can be assigned to the second half of the sixteenth century, and its superstructure was remodelled in the seventeenth century. The painting originally ran the full length of the south-east wall of this room, covering a width of 19 feet 9½ inches, but to-day the central portion has suffered so severely from damp and from atmospheric changes that the details of the design can only be made out at the ends (Pls. I and II). It obviously formed part of a series which continued round the other walls also. It starts 4 feet above the floor, either to leave room for a bancar, a bench with a high back, to stand below it, or more probably to allow of the lower edge of the painting being continued on the lintel of a fireplace which is situated at the south end of the wall. The top of the upper border is hidden by one of the joists supporting the floor above, with the result that the part exposed

¹ *The Bruce* (ed. S.T.S.), x, pp. 741-9.

measures 5 feet 2 inches in height. Of this, 3 feet 8 inches is occupied by an assemblage of vines, in which are depicted four birds, one of them obviously an eagle, as well as a hound with a collar, a squirrel, and a galloping Bactrian camel. The latter animal was not entirely unknown in mediæval Scotland, seeing that as early as 1105 one was presented by Edgar, King of Alban, to Murtough O'Brien; and in 1659 "ane heigh great beast, callit ane Drummodary" was exhibited in the Canongate of Edinburgh. The painted ceiling of 1620 at Earlshall shows an animal very like the one at Traquair and the artist labels it a "Dromedarie." The assemblage is bordered at top and bottom by texts in Gothic lettering, the upper text (Acts i, 14, 15) reading: [THESE ALL] CONTINUED W(ITH) ON(E) ACCORD IN [PRAYER AND SU]PPLICATION W(ITH) YE WOMEN AND MARY YE MOTHER OF JESUS AND W(ITH) HIS BRETHREN . AND [IN THOSE] DAYES [PETER STOOD UP IN THE MIDST OF THE DISCIPLES AND SAID, *ETC.*]. The one at the bottom (Acts i, 16-18) reads: [MEN AND BRETHREN THIS SCRIPTURE MUST NEEDS HAVE BEEN FULFILLED] WHICHE YE HOLY GHOST [BY] YE MOUTHE OF DAVID SPAKE BEFOIR OF JUDAS WHICHE WAS G[UIDE TO THEM THAT TOOK JESUS . FOR HE WAS NUMBERED WITH U[S A[N]D (HAD) O[B]TAIN]ED PA[RT OF THIS] MINISTR[Y . NOW THIS MAN PURCHASED A FIELD WITH THE REWARD OF INIQUITY, *ETC.*].

The painting is carried out in tempera on the plaster of the wall, the colours seen being black and red, but other colours of a fugitive nature may also have been employed. The brushwork is bold and confident, obviously the work of a practised hand. No evidence was seen either of pouncing or of the use of the stylus. As in the case of the earlier series at Kinneil, the details are outlined in solid colour, glazing being resorted to only on the hound, the squirrel, the camel, and the eagle.

The texts have been taken from the Geneva version which first appeared in 1557. The drawing of the hound is closely related to the illustration on p. 26 of Gesner's *Icones Animalium*, ed. 1560, which, it is interesting to note, is titled "*Ein Brack, ein schottischer Wasserhund*" (water-dog). In that illustration the dog faces left and has no collar, and one is tempted to suggest that the Traquair painter copied the collar from Gesner's illustration of an English bloodhound on the opposite page; some credit must be given, however, to his powers of invention. He certainly did not copy the camel from Gesner.

As for the background, it may represent Aceldama, the Field of Blood, but it is more likely to be a conventional assemblage. Mr Richardson has drawn our attention to a similar treatment of vines in the hall at Huntingtower, which he had tentatively dated to before 1540. At Traquair the texts afford a *terminus a quo* and the stylistic evidence puts the *terminus ad*



Mural painting at Traquair House: left-hand portion.

Crown Copyright reserved.



Mural painting at Traquair House: right-hand portion.

Crown Copyright reserved.



2. Oak door from Terregles House.

Crown Copyright reserved.



1. Oak door from Amisfield Tower.

quem at some time before 1600. In all probability this painting is to be dated towards the third quarter of the sixteenth century.

Oak Door.—In the room containing the mural may also be seen an oak door (Pl. III, 2) brought from Terregles House, Dumfriesshire, an historic building demolished about 1789 to make way for a modern mansion. This door has a special interest for us, since it has obviously been carved by the same hand as the door from Amisfield Tower in the same county that is now preserved in the National Museum. The Amisfield door (Pl. III, 1), which has been fully described in the *Inventory of Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions in the County of Dumfries*,¹ dates from 1600 and bears a representation of Samson in contemporary costume slaying the lion. Grose tells us² that the figures were coloured. Both doors show a conventional representation of a niche, probably derived from a memorial brass. In the Terregles door the niche-head is enriched with fleurs-de-lis and thistles. At the foot of the niche stands an elephant with a howdah, the harness being enriched with fleurs-de-lis. Above the howdah are carved two animals in combat, a unicorn on the left goring a lion on the right. The unicorn wears a collar to which is attached a chain. The chain is twisted round the animal's back and falls below the left hoof, where it ends in a swivel and ring. Within the ring are carved the initials L V H for William (Maxwell, 5th) Lord Herries, and the date 1601. This door is illustrated by Sir William Fraser in *The Book of Caerlaverock*.³

We desire to express our indebtedness to Mr D. S. Macdonald, W.S., F.S.A.Scot., for having obtained permission for us to publish the foregoing descriptions of the painting and the door; to the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments (Scotland) for the use of their photographs for Pls. I, II, and III; to Mr W. Beattie of the National Library of Scotland for information concerning the painter's literary sources; and to Mr J. S. Richardson, F.S.A.Scot., H.M. Inspector of Ancient Monuments, for help and advice.

¹ P. 198.

² *Antiquities*, i. p. 158.

³ Vol. i. p. 530.