

PEELING BACK THE LAYERS AT HAM HOUSE

Textile conservation reveals a forgotten 19th-century intervention

We know from the Ham House inventories that in *circa* 1679¹ the Queen's Antechamber was 'hunge with foure Pieces of blewe Damusk, impaned and bordered wth. blew velvet embroidered wth. gould and fringed'.²

It was long assumed that the damask panels of the wall hangings dated from the 17th century and had since faded to a yellow colour. As soon as May Berkouwer began the conservation work to treat the wall hangings in 2009, she found remnants of the original blue damask panels within the structure of the textile. These panels had clearly been cut away with scissors, leaving the edges stitched to the velvet borders. Through further detective work and investigation May has not only revealed the original construction and colour scheme, but has also discovered a forgotten intervention of the late 19th century.

The Duke and Duchess of Lauderdale created the Queen's Apartment, consisting of the Antechamber, Bedchamber and Closet, for Queen Catherine of Braganza in 1673. At first the Antechamber was hung with green velvet hangings and called the 'Green Drawing Roome', but it had become known as the



What the Queen might have seen: an impression of the original 17th-century colour scheme in the Queen's Apartment

NITIJ/JOHN HAMMOND

damask. Originally the velvet borders were stitched to the blue damask panels and applied to a blue linen backing before the embroidery was carried out—this was stitched through the linen. When the blue damask panels were snipped out the embroidery of the corner motifs was carefully preserved and applied to the replacement damask panels.

The original and replacement damasks differ in material and colour. The blue damask has a silk warp

and weft, whereas the later damask has a silk warp and a wet-spun linen weft typical of the late 19th century. Its turnover edges and reverse show a two-tone colourway in pink and drab, dramatically different from the 17th-century indigo blue damask. Dye analysis confirmed that the pink is an early synthetic dye, dating the damask to after 1850. The 19th-century damask pattern is clearly evident on the reverse where it had not been exposed to light. May invited Richard Humphries of the Humphries Weaving Company to visit the studio; he immediately recognized the pattern as one which the V&A commissioned him to weave for other rooms at Ham House thirty years ago. Humphries re-drew the pattern in reverse from fragmentary material in the Warner Textile Archive and named it 'Somerton'. Later research revealed that a fabric of this design was sold by Watts & Co under the name of 'Dysart', indicating a direct link to Ham House.

So then we asked ourselves the question: 'What was the design of the original 17th-century damask?' May and her assistant Gerda Koppatz undertook a weave analysis and meticulously traced the pattern from the edge remnants and from the damask in the embroidered corner motifs. When May and Gerda compared the tracings by laying them over a print-out of the Somerton pattern, they discovered that the 19th-century replacement was actually a faithful replica of the 17th-century damask pattern, although the design was inverted and carried out in a markedly different colour.

We now believe that the 19th-century damask was manufactured for Watts & Co as part of the architects G F Bodley's and T Garner's restoration and refurbishment work at Ham House in 1889–90 for the 9th Earl of Dysart, a descendant of the Duchess of Lauderdale. Along with G Gilbert Scott Jr, Bodley and Garner founded Watts & Co in 1874, and the company still exists today. It is now known mainly for furnishings supplied to churches, but domestic interiors used to be a strong part of the business. Unfortunately the Watts & Co records before 1939 are very limited, and the Ham House archives do not throw much light on this period either. Bodley and Garner carried out restoration work at Powis Castle too, and we know from the Earl of Powis's records that the Ham House work proved to be a major challenge to the architects⁴. Watts & Co sold a great deal of damask in the



MAY BERKOUWER

Peeling back history: the underside of the damask panel shows its 19th-century pink and drab colours, and remnants of the original 17th-century blue damask are revealed along the edges

Queen's Antechamber after 1679 when the blue wall hangings were installed.³ The Antechamber wall hangings are an extremely rare and hugely significant *in situ* survival. We now know that the hangings consist of blue silk velvet borders embroidered with silver gilt threads surrounding replacement damask panels with the original corner motifs applied on to the



NTE/JOHN HAMMOND

May Berkouwer and Gerda Koppatz lifting off one of the damask panels during treatment. Underneath lies the original blue linen backing. The white squares at the top and bottom are infills where the corner motifs were cut out to be made into appliqués

Dysart pattern, which was also used in other colours elsewhere at Ham House. Bodley's and Garner's work at Ham will be the subject of an article by Michael Hall in the forthcoming book celebrating Ham House's 400th anniversary to be published by Yale University Press in association with the National Trust and with the support of the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art.

The discovery of the 17th-century damask led to further inspection and technical analysis of other surviving textiles at Ham House. May and Gerda found the same damask with matching selvages in different colours in another set of wall hangings that was originally installed in the Volury Room. This set is now in fragments, but a section remains on display in the Museum Room. The damasks are currently being researched by May and Annabel Westman, and their findings will be included also in the anniversary publication. The 17th-century damasks were probably woven in France—May found a very similar pattern woven in Lyon c. 1650. It is thanks to the conservation project that the original colour of the damask was discovered inside one of the best-preserved turnover edges. Using this colour, the photographer John Hammond digitally re-coloured an image of the Queen's Antechamber (see page 11) to give us a depiction of the inventory description written over three centuries ago.

¹ Ham House inventory, 1679

² Ham House inventory, 1683

³ Ham House inventory, 1677

⁴ Michael Hall: 'Furniture of Artistic Character: Watts & Company as House Furnishers, 1874-1907', in *Furniture History* volume xxxii (Furniture History Society 1996)

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ACQUISITIONS

MONTACUTE HOUSE, SOMERSET

Two first edition books by Kipling (*Captains Courageous* and *Kim*) with a provenance from Constance Phelips have been purchased at auction for Montacute House at Rosebery's, London, for £153 including premium with funds from Montacute.

An 18th-century four-poster bed by George Weller of Exeter has been bequeathed to Montacute by the late Agatha MacKenzie, after having been on loan there and on display in the Curzon Room for a number of years.



NTE/

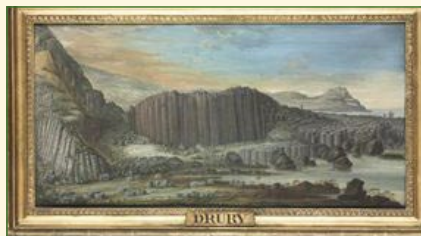
Hibernating: the Weller bed at Montacute shown when the house had been 'put to bed' for the winter closed season

OXBURGH HALL, NORFOLK

A copy of the book *Roman-Catholic Doctrines no Novelties*, published anonymously (but actually written by Hugh Cressy) in London in 1663 and with Bedingfield family ownership marks, was purchased for Oxburgh from Raymond Kilgarriff for £380. The book was published anonymously because it was illegal to produce books on Catholic subjects in England at that time.

SCOTNEY CASTLE

Two pen and ink drawings with wash by Samuel Hieronymus Grimm (1733-1794), dated 1783, have been purchased at auction at Burstow and Hewett, Battle, for £400 including premium with funds from Scotney. One of the drawings depicts Scotney Castle and provides a useful and charming record of its appearance in the 1780s.



CHRISTIES

Ancient landscape: one of two Giant's Causeway paintings at Springhill

SPRINGHILL, CO LONDONDERRY

Springhill has received a bequest from the late Anton Schafer, of Falls Church, Virginia, USA, a descendant of the Lenox-Conyngham family who used to live at the house. The



BONHAMS

Fashion Chute: neoclassical inkstand for the Vyne

bequest includes two paintings of the Giant's Causeway by Susanna Drury (*fl.* 1733-1770); another painting of the Giant's Causeway by Andrew Nicholl (1804-1886); an unattributed painting of Bantry Bay; and a letter written by a member of the Lenox-Conyngham family from the SS Titanic.

UPTON HOUSE, WARWICKSHIRE

Four groups of Sevres porcelain objects including cups and saucers, a teapot, various sugar pots and milk jugs and other items which had been stolen from Upton in 1968 were recovered as they were coming up at auction. We are grateful to our ceramics adviser, Anthony du Boulay, for his help in identifying and seeing the return of these items.

THE VYNE, HAMPSHIRE

A George III silver inkstand by William Plummer, London 1786, has been purchased at auction at Bonhams, London, for £2,346 including premium, with funds from the Vyne and from gifts and bequests. The inkstand had been owned by Thomas Chute (1721-1790), who inherited the Vyne in 1776.

Emile de Bruijn