

COLONEL ROBERT RUSHBROOKE,
M.P., J.P. (1779–1845):
GRAND TOURIST, CONNOISSEUR, COLLECTOR,
AMATEUR ARCHITECT AND WOOD CARVER

by CHARLES TRACY

INTRODUCTION

COLONEL ROBERT RUSHBROOKE (1779–1845) was a member of an ancient Suffolk gentry family.¹ He married Frances, the second illegitimate daughter of Sir Charles Davers, the 6th baronet (1737–1806), in 1808. Her family had owned the Rushbrooke estate since the early 18th century.² Robert's father-in-law was the last of his family to own the estate. Davers was a professional soldier, and spent six or seven years in Canada, where he was reputed to have married the daughter of a miller, or an American planter named Coutts. He served in the American army and later married Miss Coutts, by whom, it was said, he had a son (Hervey 1901, 386; Pitt 1997, 10). Subsequent to Sir Charles's return to England, neither mother nor son ever turned up at Rushbrooke, and he and a certain Madam Frances Treice, lived there, raising a family of five sons and three daughters. Since the couple never married, the sons could not inherit.

At Sir Charles's death in 1806, the Rushbrooke estate passed to the 5th Earl of Bristol, whose family seat was at neighbouring Ickworth. The property was therefore unoccupied, but an arrangement was reached between Colonel Rushbrooke's father, another Robert (1761–1829), and the Hervey family, that the Rushbrookes should receive the property in exchange for their adjoining Little Saxham holdings. The Colonel's grandfather, Robert Barham, had inherited the Crofts family estate at West Stow in the mid-18th century through his marriage to Elizabeth Edwards, and, in 1793, our protagonist's father, who was clearly as energetic as his son, exchanged it for Charles, Marquis Cornwallis's, Little Saxham estate. This was a deliberate strategem, because the latter's being contiguous with the Ickworth property on the west side gave him a strong bargaining counter in pursuing his objective of eventually re-acquiring the Rushbrooke lands for the family (Hervey 1901, 212). This was a timely move, given that the last legitimate member of the Davers family was already fifty-eight years old, and that on his death the estate would revert to the heirs of Sir Charles's elder sister Elizabeth, who had married the 4th Earl of Bristol. It seems unlikely that Rushbrooke senior's son Robert, then aged sixteen, and the subject of this paper, had by then formed a romantic association with his future wife, Frances Davers, the 6th Baronet's seventh child by Madam Treice. With hindsight, however, the family's occupation of the Little Saxham estate, and the marriage of Rushbrooke junior a decade later to Frances Davers, appears to have been a very smart move indeed, given that it provided an indispensable *quid pro quo* for an eventual settlement satisfactory to both parties. Apart from the more obvious reasons to celebrate the arrangement, which was finally put into effect sometime after the nuptials, the knowledge that the Davers family would continue to occupy the house and estate at Rushbrooke would have pleased Frances.

Acquisition of the demesne was a happy turn of events for the Rushbrooke family, since they were returning to property which, it was claimed, they had held before the 13th century. In the words of the memorial inscription for the Colonel's father at Rushbrooke Church:

He, after it [the estate] had been successively possessed during a period of six centuries by the families of Jermyn and Davers became the proprietor of this seat of his ancestors.

Rushbrooke Hall (Fig. 69), erected by Sir Robert Jermyn *c.* 1550, was demolished in 1961, an event which Pevsner described as a tragedy on account of the rarity in England of mansions of this date (Pevsner 1974, 409–10). He compared it to Melford Hall and Kentwell Hall, which are also built of red brick with a recessed centre and long projecting wings. The south side of the Tudor back hall range overlay a medieval hall house.³ Like Kentwell it had two polygonal turrets at the ends of the south wings, but at the outer rather than the inner angles (Fig. 70). Much of the house had been altered by the Davers family in the 18th century, and latterly most of the fenestration was of that date. Even so, original mullioned and transomed windows remained at the gable ends of the wings. The two-stage entrance porch was flanked by Tuscan columns on the ground floor, and there were pilasters crowned by supporters above, and coats of arms at both levels. In all there were eight coats of arms in the courtyard, including those of de Vere, Ufford, Rushbrooke, Jermyn and Heveningham.⁴ The Davers family's considerable wealth was dependent upon their ancestor Sir Robert (1620–85), who had amassed a fortune in sugar-planting in Barbados, and was knighted by Charles II in 1682 (Pitt 1997, 3). Amongst other Palladian improvements, they were responsible for the handsome interior of the panelled entrance hall with its Rococo stucco decoration.

Rushbrooke was one of the great mansions of Suffolk, and tradition has it that the first Queen Elizabeth held court there in 1578, and slept in the bed, which until 1919 remained in the house complete with its original hangings. There were, supposedly, other reminders of her visit, the clock bell over the main porch and three stone heads of the Queen herself. It seems, however, that the facts are more prosaic, since during the Queen's progress through Suffolk and Norfolk in that year, it was the French ambassadors who were entertained at the hall.⁵ But Sir Robert Jermyn was knighted at Bury St Edmunds, and he



FIG. 69 – Rushbrooke Hall, Suffolk: general view from south (*by permission of the Suffolk Record Office*).

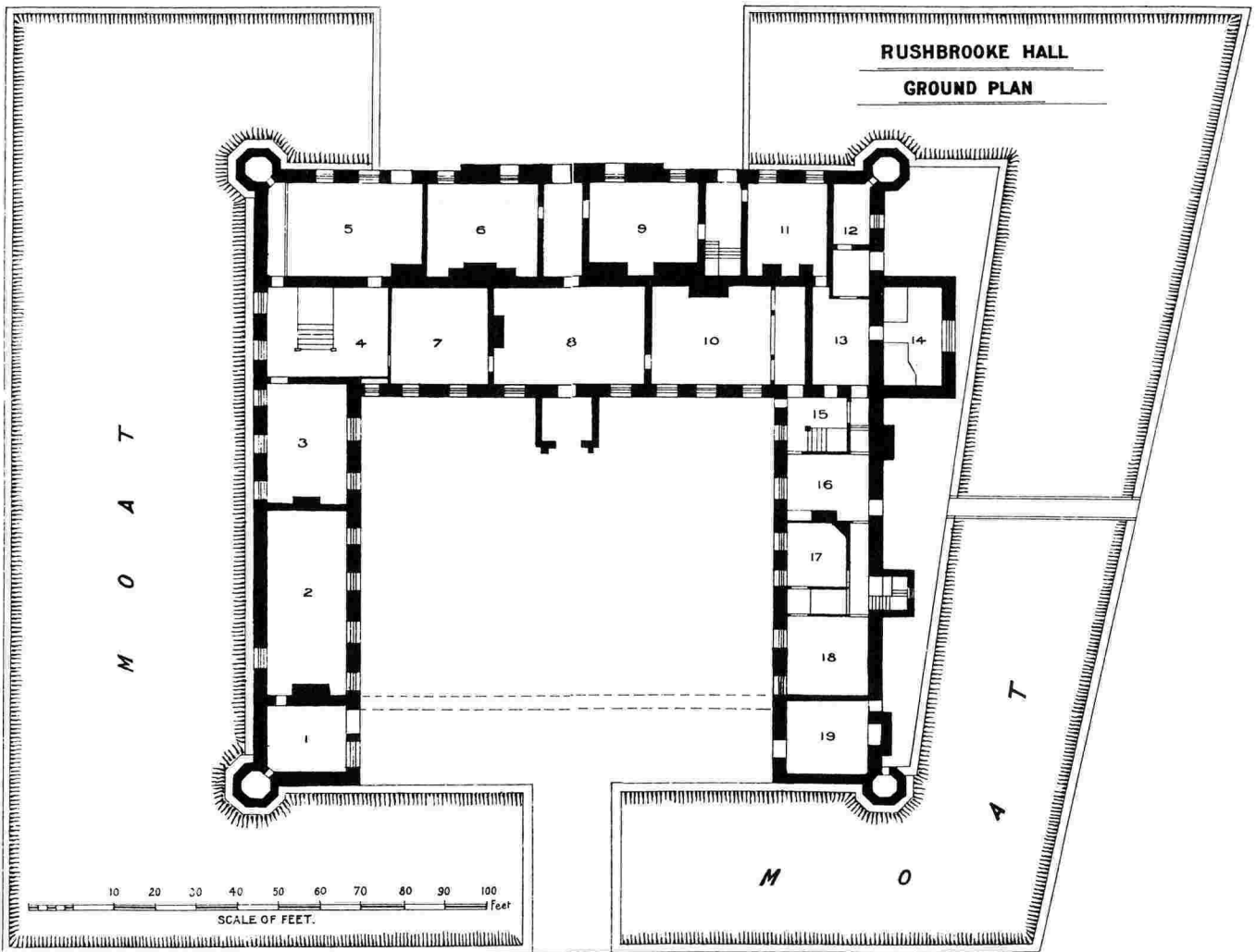


FIG. 70 - Rushbrooke Hall, Suffolk: ground plan, engraved by A. Ainsworth Hunt. Inscribed 'Bury St Ed. 1902' (by permission of the Suffolk Record Office).



FIG. 71 – *Above:* St Nicholas, Rushbrooke. View of church from south. FIG. 72 – *Below:* St Nicholas, Rushbrooke. Tympanum above chancel arch, showing medieval rood beam and 16th-century Royal Arms.

placed the bell, which is dated 1579, by Stephen Tonni of that town, in the bell chamber (Hervey 1903, 406).

A short way to the north-east the modest parish church of St Nicholas (Fig. 71) houses the monument of Sir Robert Davers, d. 1722, the second baronet, who, on his marriage in 1682 to Mary Jermyn, brought the Rushbrooke estate into that family. Also amongst the memorials, mainly to the Jermyn and Davers families, is a very unusual and touching monument to Thomas Jermyn, the last of the line, who died in 1692, aged fifteen, when tragically felled by a ship's mast. He is reclining with one hand resting on a skull. The church contains some exceptionally interesting features, including a pre-Reformation rood beam, with the tympanum above, two fine roofs, arch-braced in the nave and with cambered tie-beams in the chancel, and another with moulded rafters over the south aisle (Cautley 1974, 308). Apart from these early and mid Tudor features,⁶ the church is overlaid with Gothic-Revival improvements. The Royal Arms with early Tudor heraldry above the chancel arch were probably inserted by Colonel Rushbrooke (Fig. 72).⁷ There is



FIG. 73 – Robert Rushbrooke. Watercolour miniature by Silvester Harding, painted while he was at Trinity College, Cambridge (1796–1801) (*Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge*).



FIG. 74 - Above: St John the Baptist, Cockayne Hatley, Bedfordshire. View of church from the north-east (*English Heritage, NMR*).
FIG. 75 - Below: St John the Baptist, Cockayne Hatley. Choir-stalls from Oignies Priory near Charleroi, Belgium (*English Heritage, NMR*).



an early 19th-century timber font, and an oak pulpit of the same date, both being the latter's handiwork.⁸ Rushbrooke's motivations for putting his personal stamp on the church are quite understandable, given that by all accounts, until the late 19th-century restoration, it was virtually a mausoleum to the Jermyn and Davers families. We shall be returning later to other components of this noticeable period gloss, and the joinery exploits of our subject.

THE LANDED GENTLEMAN

Robert Rushbrooke would not have known Rushbrooke Hall as a child, as his father is unlikely to have come into the property until 1806 at the earliest, at which point the Colonel was already twenty-seven years old. The latter was born at a house in Norfolk Street, London on 2 July 1779,⁹ and baptised at St Clement Danes Church in the Strand.¹⁰ As already mentioned, Rushbrooke senior's removal to London at about this time would have followed his disposal of the West Stow estate. The Little Saxham property lost its mansion in 1773, twenty years before its acquisition by the Rushbrookes.¹¹ Robert was educated at Canterbury School, now known as The King's School.¹² He went up to Trinity

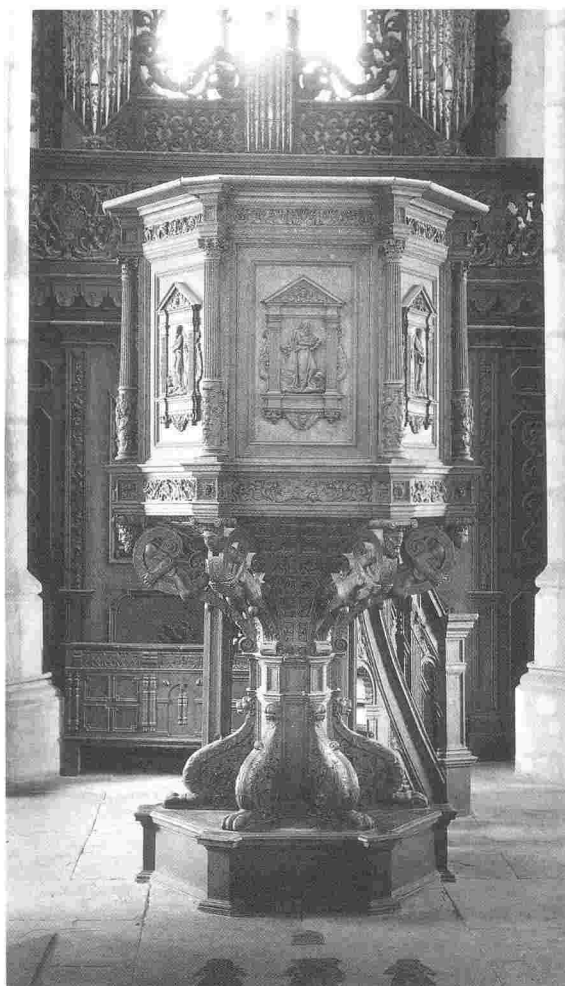


FIG. 76 – St John the Baptist, Cockayne Hatley, Bedfordshire. Pulpit from St Andrew, Antwerp, inscribed 1559 (*English Heritage, NMR*).

College, Cambridge on 19 July 1796, within a month of turning eighteen. There he spent five years, studying for his bachelor's degree, which he was awarded in 1801. He proceeded M.A. in 1804 (*A.T.C.C.*, 361). A watercolour portrait of him painted while he was at the university betrays an intelligent expression, with a suggestion of repressed humour in his eyes and mouth (Fig. 73).

From the quality of his library, and the inscriptions in his books, we know that, even by early adulthood, he had developed a keen interest in the arts and a taste for travel. There is evidence that he journeyed widely in Europe, venturing as far as Moscow. He was a budding linguist and scholar, and is known to have taken an interest in music, drama and drawing (Hervey 1903, 393). Speaking about the Rushbrooke Hall library in 1903, Sydenham Hervey, the editor of the *Rushbrook Parish Registers*, informs us that many of the more interesting books must have been bought by Colonel Rushbrooke. Some of them were of the 17th century and had the French royal arms stamped on the cover. They were presumably refugees from the French Revolution (Hervey 1903, 419).

At the same time Rushbrooke started to develop a preoccupation with military matters. In that respect he was probably reflecting the popular concern at the time with regard to a possible Napoleonic invasion.¹³ This problem was considered to be particularly acute in Suffolk. Rushbrooke's decision to join the Suffolk Militia in 1803 as a Captain, suggests that the family had moved back to the county well in advance of Charles Davers's demise in 1806. Three years later he was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel Commandant. There used to be a portrait of him at Rushbrooke Hall, dressed in his militia uniform, with 'red double-breasted coat, cut away, yellow facings, gold epaulettes, a red scarf round the waist, dark breeches, and black boots'. He is sitting 'on a garden seat with a dog at his feet, and holds a book in his left hand'. There are trees behind, and on the right the sea with 'ships on the water, with land beyond, and rocks at his feet' (Farrer 1908, 302; Hervey 1903, 440). This imaginary scene sounds as if it could have been based upon the riverscape of the River Orwell. Sadly this visual record of our subject was sold by the family some years ago, and it can no longer be traced.

From middle age he seems to have been known familiarly as 'Colonel Rushbrooke', even though it is unlikely that at any time he served in the regular army. For a period of nearly twenty years from the time of his marriage in 1808, apart from some details of his foreign travels, we have little information about his life. However, we do know that he sat as a Justice of the Peace, at the Quarter Sessions, over a period of thirty-seven years from 1808 to 1845, the year of his death, with only six absences (Phillips 1882). Otherwise he probably kept himself busy with his other interests. This seemingly undemanding period of his life is explained by the fact that he had no estate responsibilities, since his father was still alive. On the other hand, with eight children surviving into adulthood, he would have had parental duties. But the latter did not preclude a collecting expedition to Belgium, probably sometime between 1815 and 1820, and another in the company of his wife about a decade later, between 1826 and 1828.¹⁴ By then there would have been a lessening of family responsibilities, the couple's two elder daughters being virtually grown-up, and the boys at boarding school. Their return to England in 1828 may have coincided with a deterioration in Rushbrooke senior's health, and the looming onset of the heir-apparent's proprietorial duties.

His father died in 1829. Having finally adopted the mantle of landownership, the Colonel seems to have thrown himself into this new life with enthusiasm. In 1835, at the age of fifty-six, he was first elected as a Member of Parliament for the Western Division of the county of Suffolk, and served again two years later. At the election of 1841 he was returned without opposition, and remained a Member of Parliament until his death in 1845. In a history of the members of both Houses of Parliament, published in 1836, he was described as being 'against Speakership, church rates and Irish Municipal Corporation'



FIG. 77 – Above: St Nicholas, Rushbrooke. View of choir-stalls in nave, from east. FIG. 78 – Below: St Nicholas, Rushbrooke. Choir-stalls in nave, detail of west end.

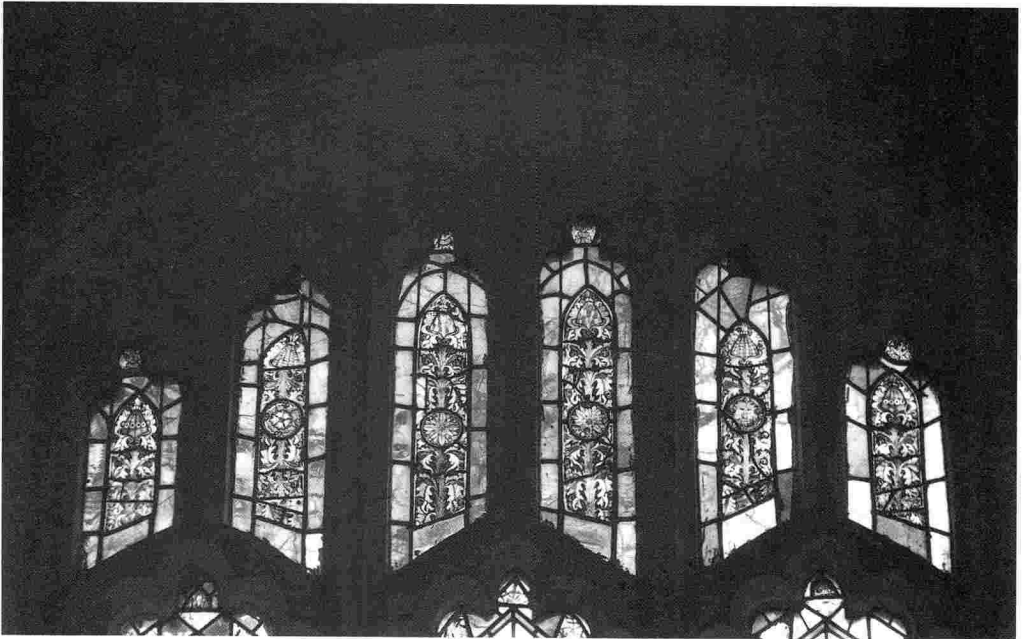


FIG. 79 – Above: St Nicholas, Rushbrooke. Round stained-glass quarry on north side of nave, with unicorn.
FIG. 80 – Below: St Nicholas, Rushbrooke. Renaissance stained-glass quarries in upper lights of west window; probably from Little Saxham Hall, Suffolk.

(Mosse 1836, I, 316, 954). His London address was given as 5, Whitehall (Mosse 1836). In the Annual Register of Members for 1845, he was described as 'strongly attached to Conservative principles, and deeply attached to the interests of Agriculture', which sounds like a break from the free-wheeling aesthetic style of his youth (Copinger 1910, 336). On the other hand, to be against church rates was hardly an Establishment position.

As a Member of Parliament his sporadic contributions to debate otherwise betray a loyalty to the *status quo*. On 1 August 1836, in answer to strong criticism from John Bright, anti-protectionist and scourge of the landed gentry, he refuted the claim of oppressive conduct by the guardians of the poor at Stowmarket, with the remark: 'In a word, the poor were never better attended, or enjoyed more comfort or contentment than under the present Poor-Law Bill'.¹⁵ In 1838, in line with the almost universal position of the landed gentry at that time, he was strongly opposed to the importation of Canadian corn, even if it was only to be brought in for grinding into flour and subsequent re-exportation. In connection with the latter proposal, he was afraid of 'rogues in grain', and that it would be impossible to guard against evasion. Indeed, demonstrating the quirky humour that permeates his three surviving letters, he exclaimed, that 'More, in this measure was meant than met the ear'.¹⁶ In the 26 June debate, 1844, he complained of articles in *The Times*, stating that the labouring classes in Suffolk were suffering great distress. He said that it was not so. 'The poorer classes in Suffolk had never been so well clothed and fed as now. In no county were the poor more cared for. There were hospitals, savings banks, national schools and allotments' (Hervey 1903, 395). At this time there had been an outbreak of rick burning in the county, but in the debate of 13 July the same year, Rushbrooke maintained 'that no county in England was better furnished with the means of education by national and provincial schools than Suffolk, and therefore it was not just of the honourable member for Finsbury [Thomas Wakley] to attribute the fires in that county to the want of education' (Hervey 1903, 396).¹⁷

In his summation of the Colonel's political and social mind-set, Hervey was less impartial than I have been. He says:

Col. Rushbrook was a kind hearted and benevolent man, but evidently one of those who have no difficulty in shutting their eyes to anything that they do not want to see, and in persuading themselves of anything they do not want to believe. The man who sixty years ago could persuade himself that the agricultural labouring class was highly paid and well educated could persuade himself of anything. The man who could not read what the blazing ricks were writing, one wonders what he could read (Hervey 1903, 397).

The Colonel seems to have been a good parent, judging from the epitaph on his memorial in the church, apparently composed by his 'affectionate' eldest son, Robert Frederic Brownlow.

On his death in 1845, and at the election of a new representative of the division, the High Sheriff of Suffolk, Henry Wilson Esq., delivered a short but heartfelt eulogy, as follows:

Our future with[?]out] Colonel Rushbrooke will be only recollections of the straightforward, accomplished, honourable-minded English gentleman, of the social and most agreeable companion, of the fair and candid opponent, of the cordial and warm-hearted friend, and above all, of the man who for many years devoted his *thoughts*, his means, his time to un-wearied attention to public duties which he owed to this county, and was especially anxious by the promotion of every valuable charity in connection with the town [Bury St Edmunds] and the district in which he resided (*B.N.P.*).

CONNOISSEUR AND COLLECTOR

Having attempted to put the man in context, and given a brief account of his life, I would now like to focus on his activities as a connoisseur and collector. He must have been inspired by the substantial holdings of Italian Old Master, Dutch and English paintings, not to mention the many Brussels and Gobelins tapestry panels, at Rushbrooke Hall (Knight *et al.* 1919). His undoubted personal artistic talents were inherited from his grandfather, Barham Rushbrooke (1721–82), whose painting of *Belshazzar's Feast* hung in the house (Knight *et al.* 1919). The Colonel's love of travel was, of course, shared by many members of the English landed aristocracy and gentry. His credentials as a Grand Tourist are secure on the basis alone of his acquisition of a marble and ebonised micromosaic. It is a signed and probably early version of 'Chronological Rome' by Michelangelo Barberi. Other mosaics of this subject have found their way to the Hermitage Museum, the Gilbert Collection in London, and the estate of the Middleton family, sometime of Middleton, County Cork.

As already noted, until the mid 1820s, the Rushbrookes would have been caught up with the responsibilities of bringing up a large family, although these pre-occupations hardly acted as a brake on the collecting instincts of the *paterfamilias*. From the letters that he wrote from the Low Countries to his life-long friend, the Hon. and Revd Henry Cockayne Cust, on the occasion of his extended excursion with his wife from 1826 to 1828, it is clear that, on this occasion, sight-seeing was an important preoccupation for husband and wife.¹⁸ Here are two extracts from a description, dated June 1826, of a two-week excursion to Holland:



FIG. 81 – St Peter, Nowton, Suffolk. Nave and east window, filled mainly with Flemish glass collected by Colonel Rushbrooke: roundel with *Christ carrying the Cross* (from nave). Style of Jacob Cornelisz, 16th-century.

. . . With the pictures at Hague and Amsterdam, I was enchanted, and the trip to Brock and Laardam. The organ at Haarlem was in full blow – not so the Hyacinths and Tulips, they were nipped by the frost. Our journey was chiefly by water, i.e. from Antwerp to Rotterdam by steam, passing all the objects of interest . . . The succession of Truhtschusts [a type of boat] conveyed us thence as far as Utrecht on the banks of whose canal are some villas which are really, in taste of planting, Twickenham-esque. We returned thence to Antwerp in hired vehicle.

Finally, returning to the subject of The Hague:

The House in the wood is a bad affair, save for the overwhelming room in the centre. The walk thither from Hague delightfully varied by the new lakes and winding paths. We were at the Hague during the fair which rivals Bury in Munchery and Monkeyism. The sameness of style in the Dutch towns gives a surfeit ere you reach the capital. The doggedness of the natives and the [*illegible*] of their charges, are great drawbacks to this tour . . .

Robert Rushbrooke was just a couple of years older than Henry Cust, and the two overlapped for several years at Trinity College, Cambridge. At all events from the former's



FIG. 82 – Melford Hall, Long Melford, Suffolk. Gatehouse designed by Colonel Rushbrooke: east side.

letters it is clear that the relationship was close. Unfortunately no reciprocal letters survive, but it is probable that from the moment that Cust took possession of the estate at Cockayne Hatley in Bedfordshire, as squire and rector, in 1806, he would have shared with his friend a pre-occupation with the restoration and refurbishment of a parish church (Fig. 74).¹⁹ On his institution Cust found that his church was, like so many in England at that time, in a most 'lamentable state of neglect'. Indeed, according to his son, Thomas Needham Cust, 'the stone of the east window had crumbled away, and on Christmas Day 1806 snow fell through the roof on to the altar during the service. He undertook a major restoration, which was completed by 1830'.

Henry Cust, being the second son of the 1st Baron Brownlow, was well able to fund such an expensive project. Moreover, instead of commissioning plain functional furniture from an English source, encouraged by Robert Rushbrooke, no doubt, he developed a taste for Catholic Baroque material from Belgium. Cust himself was no stranger to the Low Countries and the more accessible areas of Northern Europe. Indeed he was an assiduous tourist, and travelled with his wife regularly on three-week 'excursions'. At that time in Belgium there was much church furniture, ejected from secularised churches, on the market. But Cust, as an active Canon and administrator at St George's Chapel, Windsor, would not have had enough time to make the necessary contacts with foreign dealers to carry out his intentions single-handed. Happily Rushbrooke was there to act as his agent, finding new pieces, and smoothing the path of imports through the Customs House.

At Cockayne Hatley the Baroque monastic choir-stalls, originating from the Regular Augustinian Priory at Oignies in Belgium (Tracy 2001, cat. M/9), and a superb Renaissance pulpit, from St Andrew's Church, Antwerp (Tracy 2001, cat. K/4), were shipped from Belgium and erected in the Bedfordshire church in 1826 at the enormous cost of £345 (Figs 75,76). The rest of the woodwork was installed in 1827 and 1830 – two sets of altar rails (Tracy 2001, cats B/3, B/4), an organ loft rail (Tracy 2001, cat. B/5), the material for the family pew, said to have come from St Bavo's Cathedral, Ghent (Tracy 2001, 48, Pl.I5), and a pair of folding doors from Leuven for under the organ (Tracy 2001, cat. J/5). The cost of purchasing these items totalled over £311. Moreover in 1827 Cust and Rushbrooke had discussed the possibility of obtaining some Flemish stained glass for the east window at Hatley, and Rushbrooke asked his friend to send him the measurements. The Colonel also mentioned that he might be able to obtain an organ case locally, but in the end Cust decided to buy some pipes and decorate them, as the former was also later to do in his own church.

The very unusual business relationship between patron and agent at Hatley is brought vividly to life in Rushbrooke's surviving letters. The tone of familiarity and quirky humour in his missives pre-supposes a reciprocal level of fraternal trust. A major problem for Cust was that the Hatley church is essentially a long narrow space, with only meagre north and south nave aisles, and a relatively short east end. It was impossible to fit a row of eleven choir-stalls each side to the east of the chancel arch, and in the event they had to spill over into the nave.

Moreover, when the pulpit arrived it must have been obvious that there was barely room for it anywhere. As Rushbrooke said in his letter of 13 June 1826, soon after its arrival: 'Plague on the Primrose proportions what trouble they give you!'. '... the *honest* pulpit is without the pale . . .', he states, as indeed it eventually was, finding a resting place only at the back of the nave. But, reviewing the entire project, Rushbrooke expresses relief: '... since I find my Commission has given *such complete satisfaction*'. And moreover: 'I am glad you are not alarmed at all the cost'.

An item of particular interest in the letters is the identity of one of the dealers that Rushbrooke used, who was probably based in Brussels. In his letter, dated 16 January 1827, about the acquisition of stained glass, he says:

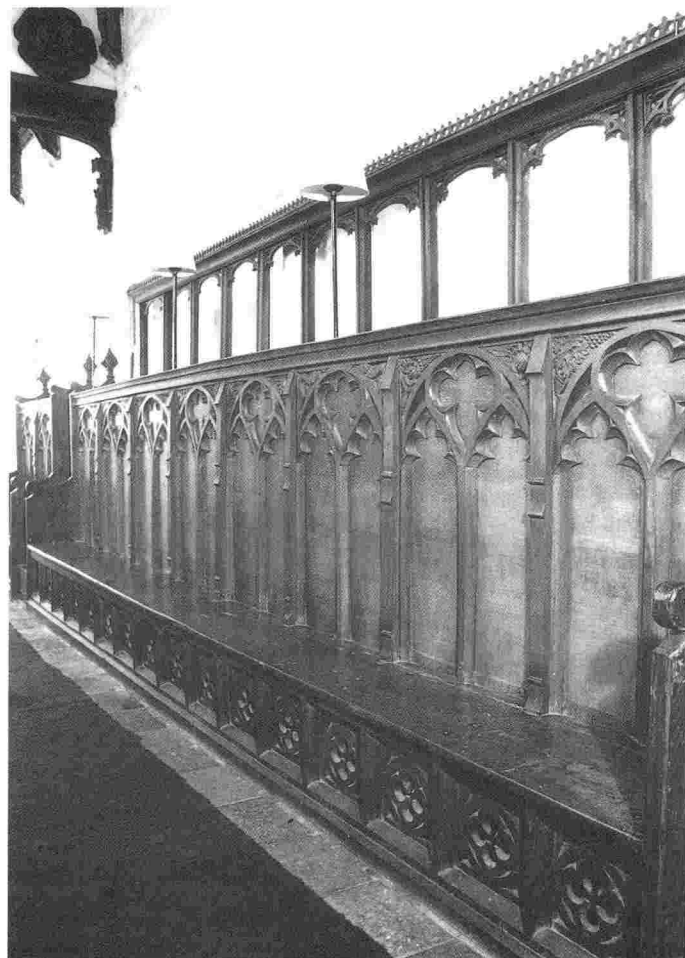


FIG. 83 – *Left*: St Nicholas, Rushbrooke. Choir-stalls: re-used 17th-century bench ends. FIG. 84 – *Right*: St Nicholas, Rushbrooke. Choir-stalls: view from north side.

I am on the scent both here and Gand [*sic.*, i.e. Ghent] & hope in a week or ten days to hear of my *Hammock* Joe. & in the meantime to have your illustrations [of the east window] for my Guide . . . Joseph [Heminius] enquired how far from London was the *revived abbey* & literally will *some* day pay you a visit of respect & curiosity . . .

Rushbrooke then goes on to discuss the possibility of visiting Hatley, which he clearly had not done since the arrival of the pulpit and ‘pewing’, eight months earlier: ‘It was with great practice and forbearance that I eschewed the *Land of Cockayne* in my last flight to Britain. But I had to trespass on a day or two of the Boy’s Vacation, and it was, for business sake & their desire of Reunion was too ardent to admit of it’. He then shows us how business was conducted between them, in a most gentlemanly way:

As to the little Balance against me, let it rest, I pray, until it be *swollen* by the gateway [the folding doors to be placed underneath the ‘organ-loft’]. You are so prudent a personage. No one will accuse you, or fear that you are ‘Keeping a more *swelling post*’ Than what your means may grant continuance’.

For myself, on that head what with feelings of the present & fears for the future, I have resolved to extenuate my stay herein one twelvemonth more than at first intended. So that if you have more *Abbeys* to endow & to decorate, you may be assured of my Agency until September 1828. . . . Bye the Bye in the collection of *Candlesticks* from Gand, have you been so thoughtful to reserve me a *pair*? I hope I sent as liberal a supply as to be able to [*illegible*] a *Claim* for twain of these



FIG. 85 – St Nicholas, Rushbrooke. Choir-stalls: carved door-head on south side.

for my Altar piece, but do not spoil any of your plans if they be requisit for the [illegible] . . . Your delight with these well applied materials which my researches have procured so happily gives me an equal enthusiasm with yourself and fancy for my reward, I shall say, as the Poet to his mistress, "*You are pleased & your'e my pleasure*".

The retrieval of these letters has provided an insight into a most unusual arrangement, the normal procedure at that time being for articles of this kind to be either purchased at auction or obtained direct from a London furniture 'broker'. Rushbrooke's excellent command of French would have been invaluable to him in negotiating with the *brocanteurs* in Belgium. Doubtless the cost of acquiring this material through the more conventional channels would have been far greater.

As we have already seen, the Colonel's own church of St Nicholas, Rushbrooke, like that at Cockayne Hatley, is a building of modest proportions (Fig. 71). Architecturally, apart from the 14th-century west tower, it is of early and late 16th-century date (Pevsner 1974, 408–09; Paine 1998, 264–65). As already mentioned, it is endowed with some rare fittings, but the set of thirty-five stalls, carved by the Colonel himself, and arranged in the nave, college-wise, is a *coup de théâtre* (Fig. 77). You enter the church through the south door, and crossing the south nave aisle, penetrate the body of the nave, only to find yourself in the heart of a liturgical choir! Two rows of seventeen stalls each side are ranged along the nave



FIG. 86 – St Nicholas, Rushbrooke. Wooden pulpit, carved by Colonel Rushbrooke.

wall, and returned in front of the west tower. They are crowned at this point with a pretty array of painted false organ pipes, as one finds at Cockayne Hatley (Fig. 78). Also the precedent for placing choir-stalls in the nave reminds us of the Bedfordshire church.

The stained glass at Rushbrooke Church is not without interest, as it betrays the Colonel's collecting instincts. It was re-set, in the early 19th century, within some rather harsh blue borders, characteristic of the period. Unfortunately many of the medieval fragments are so corroded as to be now illegible, but there are two round quarries illustrating unicorns on the north side (Fig. 79), and several interesting fragments in the east window. Here there is the well-preserved figure of a bishop, and some Tudor Royal Arms, but of particular interest are the fine Renaissance glass quarries under the arch (Fig. 80). The latter must have been made in the early 16th century, and are thought to be local work, probably made in Norwich. According to some unpublished notes by Christopher Woodforde, the heraldic glass at Rushbrooke, and quite probably the rest of it, came from Little Saxham Hall.²⁰ Ever since the Colonel's grandfather had settled at West Stow, the Rushbrookes would have been on familiar terms with the Crofts family, who owned it. Little Saxham Hall, an early moated Tudor brick mansion on a courtyard plan, was built by Sir Thomas Lucas, Solicitor General to Henry VII, who died in 1531.²¹ It was pulled down by Richard Crofts in 1773 (Hervey 1901, 211, 212), at which time the Colonel's father could have acquired the glass. This was, of course, twenty years before the latter acquired the estate. The extant building accounts for Little Saxham Hall (BL Add. MS 7097) reveal that a substantial sum of money (£5 4s. 8d.) was expended on 'Normandy glass'.²² The refugees at Rushbrooke could very easily be Continental in origin, and quite possibly identifiable with the documented Little Saxham material. The hope that perhaps Rushbrooke Church might obtain a set of the Flemish candlesticks, mentioned by the Colonel in his letter of 16 January 1827 to Henry Cust, was not realised.

Of far greater importance, however, is the astonishing collection of stained and enamelled glass at the neighbouring church of Nowton (Fig. 81). A brass tablet, placed under the west window of the tower in 1820, tells us that 'this church was embellished and decorated with Painted Glass, collected from the Monasteries at Brussels . . .'. Moreover, David Elisha Davy's 'Collections for the History of the Hundreds of Suffolk', a manuscript in the British Library (Add. MS. 19,109), reveals that

The East window is large, and filled with painted glass; consisting of numerous small circles, representing portions of Scriptural History, and legends, set in modern glass by a man at Norwich; the other windows throughout the church are filled in like manner; the circles were all collected abroad by Col. Rushbrooke, and purchased by the present Mr. Oakes [Orbell Ray Oakes, d. 1837], who placed them in their present situation at his own expense, as well as presented them to the Parish.

William Cole put the likely date of its insertion between 1816 and 1819 (Cole 1993, 165–74). This dating is evidence that the Colonel must have made a prolonged visit to Belgium, earlier than the one connected with the re-furnishings at Cockayne Hatley between 1826 and 1828. The fact that the Nowton glass does not only come from Brussels, but also from Mechelen, Antwerp and Leuven, suggests that its assembly probably involved more than one dealer, and would have been a time-consuming business.

It seems that Robert Rushbrooke's sole essay in architecture was the gateway of Melford Hall, Long Melford, which he designed for Sir Hyde Parker in 1838 (Fig. 82). This is a pleasing composition which is strictly in keeping with the mansion's architecture. Unfortunately no drawings or records survive.²³



FIG. 87 – St Nicholas, Rushbrooke. Choir-stalls: Details from lower panelling, north side.

WOOD CARVER AND JOINER

Although by the end of the 1820s the Colonel's commitment to the Militia may have waned, his duties as a Justice of the Peace,²⁴ and from 1835, that of the local Member of Parliament, would have taken up most of his time. Nonetheless his love of church furniture and woodcarving had apparently become so firmly entrenched, that he was moved to build a set of stalls himself for Rushbrooke church. Proof of this extraordinary enterprise is still to be seen today.

Our protagonist's activities as an amateur joiner and wood-carver were illuminated at the turn of the 20th century by some remarks of Hervey's:

He was a man of many accomplishments. The books bought by him show him to have been a scholar and linguist. He had a turn for music, drawing, and acting. His special delight seems to have been in wood carving. The seats in Rushbrooke Church, which are arranged chapell wise, are all of his carving. An old inhabitant of Rushbrook, who once lived in service in the hall, has told me that he has spent his nights at work in the church. But one cannot help wishing that his industry and skill had found some other vent. The church has not been improved by his work, and rooms at the hall have been dismantled to furnish him with material (Hervey 1903, 393).

So let us take a closer look at this maligned woodwork. Someone confronting it for the first time might be taken in by its medieval appearance. This impression is in part created by the employment of re-used oak timber over four hundred years old. It is something of a shock to our conservation-minded generation that much of it was Tudor panelling from the Hall. Indeed the end room in the west wing of the house, and the adjoining office, which were later known as the 'unfinished rooms', were stripped for this purpose (Fig. 70).²⁵ As Hervey (1903, 403) observed: '... they were brought to their present desolate condition in order that Colonel Rushbrooke might be supplied with material for his work in the church'. One could add that battening was also supplied for the backs of some of the stall arcading cut from a 17th-century commandment board. There are ten rather crude, but probably 17th-century, bench-ends with diamond-shaped poppy heads used in the stalls, and ten more of the same pattern re-used at ground level (Fig. 83). All of these were probably attached to a set of benches formerly in the nave. No doubt the ancient planks used as the stall seating were also salvaged from the former benches.

Although some of the tracery heads above the lower seats look on first inspection to be medieval, they are Rushbrooke's handiwork, and, again, carved from ancient timber (Fig. 84). The quatrefoil openings underneath the lower seats are convincingly faithful to a medieval prototype, but their workmanship is 19th-century. The only genuine late medieval elements in the whole ensemble are the somewhat truncated door-heads above the north and south 'entrances', and another above the entrance to the south aisle (Fig. 85). In addition a pair of early 16th-century bench-ends has been inserted at the west end at the entrance to the stalls.

Much of the panelling is quite crude in appearance, particularly that on the pulpit (Fig. 86) and font. On the other hand, greater care has been expended on the tracery-heads and the quatrefoil openings underneath the lower seats. It is easy to be critical, but Rushbrooke undertook a task which would have occupied a professional workshop for at least three months. Firstly, he would have had to design the stalls and their foundations with reference to the timber and fragments available. Given his amateur status, one could allow the Colonel at least double the man-hours needed for a professional job. In that case he would have needed approximately a year and a half's full-time work, to be undertaken in

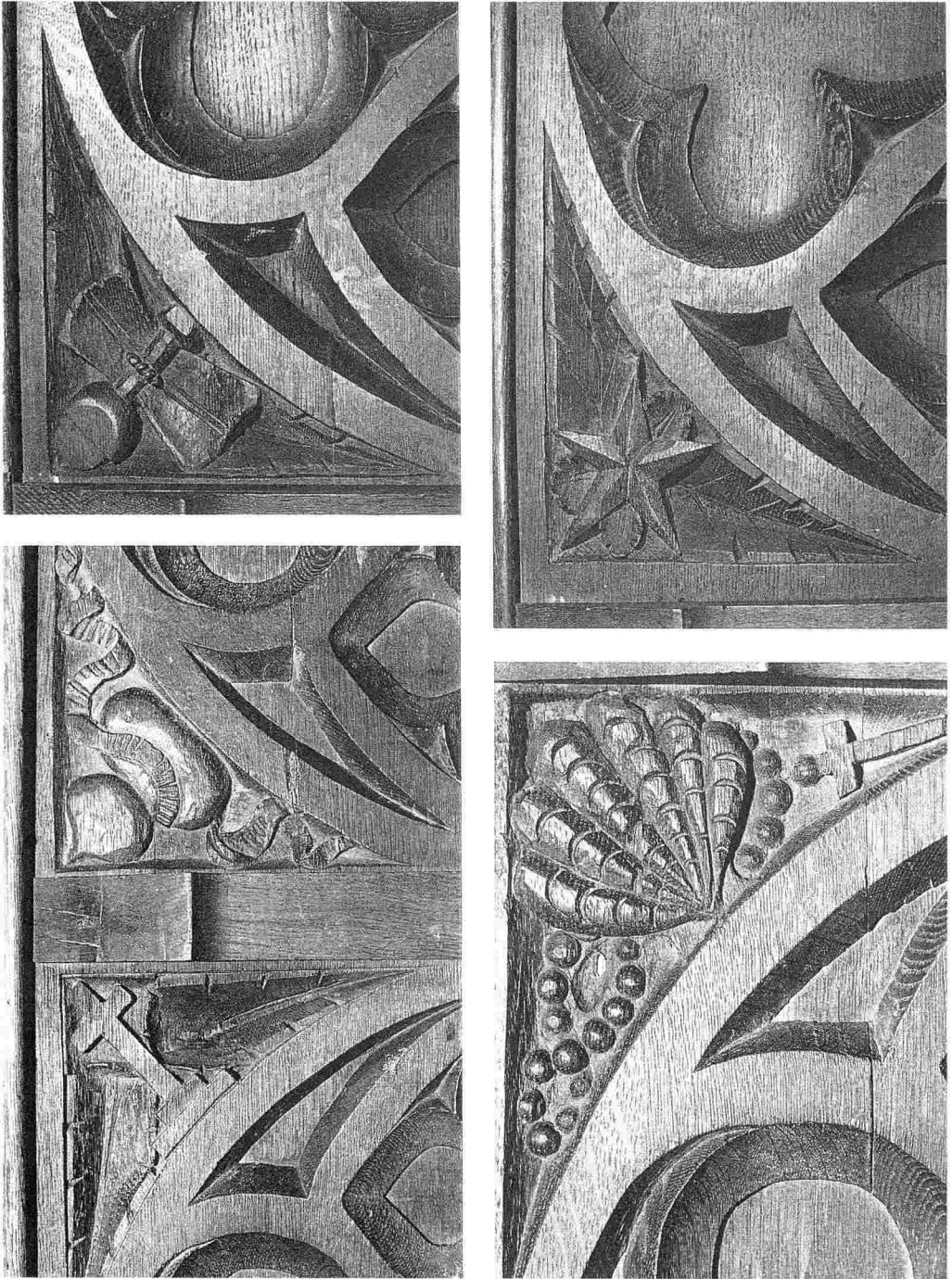


FIG. 88 – St Nicholas, Rushbrooke. Choir stalls: spandrels of lower benches, montage of some Catholic motifs.

his spare time! One is not at all surprised that by lamplight he spent many nights labouring in the church, and one can perhaps begin to understand why he contributed so little to the Parliamentary debates! He probably made the furniture during the second half of the 1830s, and had, in any case, finished the work by 1840 when, on his second visit to the church, David Elisha Davy reported that the nave 'is fitted up with a row of stalls on each side, resembling Cathedrals, and the three arches into the aisle are partly stopped up, so as to render the Church very dark: at the W.end is a sham organ',²⁶ Ever since he had started buying Flemish woodwork for his friend Henry Cust, Rushbrooke seems to have been in the grip of an obsession. Without being melodramatic, one could almost be forgiven for wondering if this self-imposed task ultimately became so onerous that it drove its executant to an early grave.

Some of the carving is rather perfunctory, for instance in the way that the crockets on finials are summarily treated, although seen at a distance, as on the superstructure at the west end, they work perfectly well. But the Colonel was capable of better work than this. Given the magnitude of the task, and, inevitably, the need to cut corners in certain situations, he would have had to try to save time wherever possible. In a professional workshop there would have been a carpenter to do the sawing and tedious repetitive preparatory work. Unless Rushbrooke obtained help, all this would have fallen entirely upon his shoulders. This was a predicament shared by another gentleman wood-carver, Allesley Boughton-Leigh of Boughton Hall, Warwickshire at the end of the 19th century. His medieval church at Brownsover was rebuilt for him by George Gilbert Scott in 1877. He re-assembled a Flemish pulpit which he had obtained, and was responsible for carving and installing a large amount of decorative woodwork in the church, including a rood screen (Tracy 2001, cat. K/2).

With all the joinery that had to be done at St Nicholas, the Colonel had set himself a somewhat tedious and repetitive task. On the other hand, as a putative architect, he would have enjoyed the design work. The main focus of carving would have been the twenty-four spandrels of the tracery-heads behind the lower seats. Much care has been expended on some of them, such as the animals, like the hare and the lion (Fig. 87). On some of the other creatures, however, his inspiration seems to have flagged, and the carving style can be described as amateur. On six of the eight panels west of the 'entrances', presumably to save time, he consistently used a simple leaf for the spandrels. On the other hand, there are a few particularly well-carved spandrels at the east end, which contain motifs, apparently betraying his love of Flemish Catholic furnishings. Here he has introduced distinctly post-Tridentine imagery into an Anglican setting, imitating what his friend Henry Cust had done at Cockayne Hatley. Certain motifs are surprising for an English parish church, such as the Cross, rosary, chalice, cockerel, fish, grapes and the Manna (Fig. 88).

New ecclesiastical joinery, in the shape of benches, was supplied probably about twenty years earlier in the adjacent parish church of Nowton, where Rushbrooke's Flemish glass collection had been used in the refurbishment. The presentation there is quite different, more conservative, and the carving less imaginative, but professional.

CONCLUSIONS

We must, surely, ask ourselves whether it was acceptable for the Colonel to rob the panelling from his Tudor mansion to make up a set of pseudo-Gothic choir-stalls. At the same time, however, we should resist the temptation to judge him by the standards of our own day. After all, the illustrious Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin involved himself in the re-use of heterogeneous historical fragments, for instance at Oscott College, Sutton Coldfield, St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham and elsewhere.²⁷ He also produced domestic

made-up set pieces, like the extraordinary double doors at Scarisbrick Hall, Lancashire, assembled from components of spectacular late-medieval Flemish choir-stall ends (Tracy 2001, cat. M/28).

In a wider context, there was a regular trade in made-up domestic furniture, which was consistently promoted by the London brokers from the 1830s. The fashion for these goods, as well as their dishonesty of craftsmanship, was attacked by H.N. Humphries in 1853:

A variety of interesting publications have called public attention to the rich productions of medieval skill during the last twelve or fifteen years, causing the previous frigid attempts at reproducing a classical style in furniture to be completely abandoned for the medieval styles. But in most cases those styles have been but imperfectly comprehended by the public at large, and a vast Wardour-Street commerce has been erected on the sure foundation of that ignorance, which is likely to last at least as long as the wretchedly cotted up specimens which minister to it.

These wretched patchwork combinations, consisting of every incongruous mixture, stuck together so as to form some article of furniture in common use have hitherto found a ready sale, though without any pervading design, and the detached pieces themselves being generally fragments of the coarsest and most worthless specimens (Humphries 1852, 95).

History will judge whether Colonel Rushbrooke's efforts in his parish church rise above the class of the material excoriated by Humphries. Perhaps at least, if we can learn to understand the *zeitgeist* of the period, we may come to be a little more forgiving than Hervey in our judgement of his workmanship. Moreover, if in addition we take into account the sum of the embellishments which the Colonel left to his own church, the sumptuous Continental re-furnishing of the 'reformed abbey' in Bedfordshire, and the breathtaking Flemish glazing at Nowton church, it will become apparent that his enabling artistic patrimony adds up to one of the most important antiquarian contributions of the 19th century. In my view, he deserves to join the ranks of the select band of pioneers in this field, such as Charles Scarisbrick (1800–60) at Scarisbrick Hall, Lancashire, Robert Henley, 3rd Baron Ongley (1803–77) at Old Warden, Bedfordshire, the 5th Lord Monson (1805–41) at Gatton, Surrey, Thomas Hibbert (1788–1879) at Birtles, Cheshire, George Weare Braikenridge (1775–1856) at Brislington, near Bristol, William Brougham, 2nd Lord Brougham and Vaux (1795–1884) at Brougham, Cumbria, and Sir Henry Bedingfeld (1800–87) at Oxburgh Hall, Norfolk. In addition to the Colonel's record as a highly cultured and innovative antiquary, which stands comparison in many respects with the select company above, he also served his county well for nearly forty years, in military, legal and parliamentary capacities. Should he not, therefore, be rescued from the penumbra of obscurity, and take his rightful place in the Pantheon of Suffolk worthies?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to the vicar and churchwardens of St Nicholas, Rushbrooke, Suffolk and St John the Baptist, Cockayne Hatley, Bedfordshire, for allowing me to take the photographs used in this article. Bob Jones kindly made available parts of a transcript of the building accounts for Little Saxham Hall. I am grateful to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge and the National Monuments Record for permission to use their library photographs. The extracts from Colonel Rushbrooke's letters are reproduced with the permission of the Lincolnshire Archives. The staff at the Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds and Ipswich branches have been unflinching helpful.

NOTES

- 1 For the history and genealogy of the family, and their supposed descent from the original Rushbrookes of Rushbrooke, see Copinger 1910, 331, 336.
- 2 Since the early 19th century the name Rushbrooke has been inconsistently spelt both with and without the final e. I have used the modern spelling throughout.
- 3 Although no archaeological investigation has ever been carried out on the site, this is asserted by Paine (1998, 265). The back hall was doubled-up by the Davers family in the 18th century (Fig. 70).
- 4 Paine 1998, 264–65. Michael de Rushbrooke having no male successor, his eldest daughter Agnes's son, John, inherited the estate in the late 13th century. His father was Sir Thomas Jermyn. See Copinger 1910, 331.
- 5 See Thomas Churchyard, 'The entertaynment of the Queenes Majestie into Suffolke and Norffolke', in Nichols 1788, 54–55. He states that Sir Robert Jermyn 'feasted the French Ambassadors two severall times with whiche charges and courtesie they stood marvellously contented'. The queen stayed with Sir Robert's father-in-law in the old abbot's palace at Bury St Edmunds. I am grateful to Clive Paine for this reference.
- 6 In 1496 Sir Thomas Jermyn gave £66 3s. 4d. to repair the church and extend the south chapel. See Paine, 1998, 264–65. In the mid-16th century, probably at the time that Rushbrooke Hall was altered, major repairs were carried out in red brick throughout the building, but particularly on the nave, whose roof has been dated to this time, and south porch (*ibid.*).
- 7 The status of the Royal Arms at Rushbrooke is uncertain, notwithstanding Cautley's confidence that they are authentic (Cautley 1974, 16). It is sometimes suggested that they were erected in 1540 by Thomas Jermyn on his receipt of the manor from Henry VIII, though it seems unlikely that during this monarch's reign anyone would have put up a set of Royal Arms in this sensitive position. Their presence in the church was not mentioned by H.I. and David Elisha Davy during a visit to the church in 1840. (It is thought that the initials H.I. are in fact H.J. for Henry Jermyn, who died in 1820, and that the accounts of two separate visits have been conflated). A few years later S. Tymms of Bury St Edmunds stated categorically that the the Royal Arms were a 'modern introduction'. See *Proc. Suffolk Inst. Archaeol.*, VII (1895), 336, and Tymms 1855, no.502. It seems almost certain that they were erected by Col. Rushbrooke. It will be possible to date them more precisely from the investigation of their manufacture and polychromy which is now underway.
- 8 The stone medieval font has only recently been presented to the church.
- 9 My thanks to Paul Pollak, School Archivist of The King's School, Canterbury for this information culled from their contemporary entry book.
- 10 I am indebted to Peter Rushbrook for this information.
- 11 See below.
- 12 The reference to Rushbrooke's school attendance is given in *A.T.C.C.*, 361. This has been confirmed by the school archivist.
- 13 This is discussed in Lawrence 2000, 470–83.
- 14 He took three years out from attendance at the assizes between 1825 and 1829.
- 15 Hansard, xxxv, 8.7.1836–20.8.1836, cols 669–70, Debate HOC, 1 August 1836. His contributions to the House of Commons debates are also recorded in Hervey 1903, 394–97.
- 16 Hansard, xli, 22.2.'38–28.3.'38, col.1093, Debate HOC, 20 March 1838.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 396.
- 18 Rushbrooke's three letters, which are in the Lincolnshire Archives (L.A.), are partially transcribed in Tracy 2001, Appendix 2.
- 19 For an account of Cust's acquisitions, see Tracy 2001, 65–71.
- 20 Information supplied by David King.
- 21 There is no hard information about the ground plan at Little Saxham Hall. Information from Bob Jones.
- 22 The building accounts show that this sum of money would have bought thirty acres of land or twenty tons of stone.
- 23 In a report by Bill Wilson commissioned by the National Trust in the early 1990s, the gateway is described as:

A pair of semi-detached gatehouses at the main entrance to the park . . . Red brick laid in English bond. Gabled plaintiled roofs. The pattern is of two single-storeyed gabled houses with their gable-ends to the road linked by a tall arch slung between a pair of polygonal towers. The towers begin as a rectangular plan with a four-centred arch in the east side leading to a small shelter. At the level of the roofs of the houses they turn octagonal and are linked by a four-centred arch with a straight parapet. The tops of the towers have leaded windows and carry ogeed caps. The facets of the caps have shell motifs like the main Hall.

The two houses have a two-light casement in the west gable ends under a hood mould on label stops, a shouldered gable parapet and a shield in the gable head. A similar window lights the east gable-end. Doorways next to the wall stacks on the north and south flanks.

I am grateful to Tessa Gibson for allowing me to quote this excerpt.

- 24 It seems probable, but I have not been able to establish whether the Colonel ever studied for a law degree.
 25 Hervey 1903, 403. Numbered 1 and 2 on the plan. See Fig. 70 in this paper.
 26 [Jermyn] and Davy 1840, 337.
 27 For instance, the made-up reredoses at Oscott College chapel and St Chad's Cathedral.

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Abbreviations

- A.T.C.C. *Admissions to Trinity College, Cambridge*, III, 1911. London.
 B.N.P. *Bury and Norwich Post*, 9 July, 1845.
 Hansard. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*.
 L.A. Lincolnshire Archives. Brownlow Papers.
 S.R.O.B. Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds Branch.