

WALL-PAINTINGS DISCOVERED AT THE MANOR HOUSE, MILDENHALL.

By THE REV. G. MONTAGU BENTON, F.S.A.

The Manor House at Mildenhall, said to have been built by Sir Henry North late in the sixteenth century, has recently been demolished. In one of the rooms on the ground floor was to be seen a fragment of contemporary wall-painting, which, since its discovery some years ago, had been protected by a sheet of glass, placed there by the former owner, the late Sir Henry Bunbury. This interesting example of wall-decoration was for a time in jeopardy, and it is gratifying to record that, through the instrumentality of the Rev. H. Tyrrell Green, M.A., it has been removed to the Victoria and Albert Museum for preservation. (See Fig. 1). It measures 4 feet 4 inches in width and 2 feet 2 inches in height, and, although it was not at the top of the wall, appears, originally, to have formed part of a frieze. The design is painted in black and gray, and consists of foliated scroll-work, in which a siren-like creature is introduced on the right and a lion rampant on the left, a hind leg of the latter being bitten by what appears to be a basilisk, of which only the head has survived.

Subsequently, extensive remains of decoration were found behind a brick facing that had been built across a corner of the same room. (See Fig. 2). Unfortunately this inner wall had been partly demolished before attention was called to the paintings, which have since been totally destroyed. They covered an area 9 feet in width and 5½ feet in height, and were executed in black on a gray ground, with slight shading in red. The general scheme comprised three vertical panels. On the first panel was depicted a female figure with legs terminating in a floriated scroll. She held a mirror in the left hand, and may perhaps have been intended for Prudence—one of the Moral Virtues. Above her head was a tablet inscribed with a black-letter inscription, of which only the letters INTLY, followed by a heart, remained. The second panel bore a decorative device, and, at the base, the upper half of a winged figure playing upon double pipes. On the third panel, which was less perfect than the others, was the lower half of a male figure wearing trunk-hose cut into "panes," and shoes and stockings; the shoes, with rounded toes, had an embryo tongue in front. The right hand was clutching a bag fastened to the side; the left hand may have held a staff, or possibly a sword was attached to the girdle.

The designs exhibit the fantastic element common to the Renaissance period; and although Italian influence is obvious, it was doubtless derived through Dutch channels. The work dated from c. 1580.

I must add that I did not see the paintings myself, and that this note is based on information and photographs supplied by Mr. Tyrrell Green.

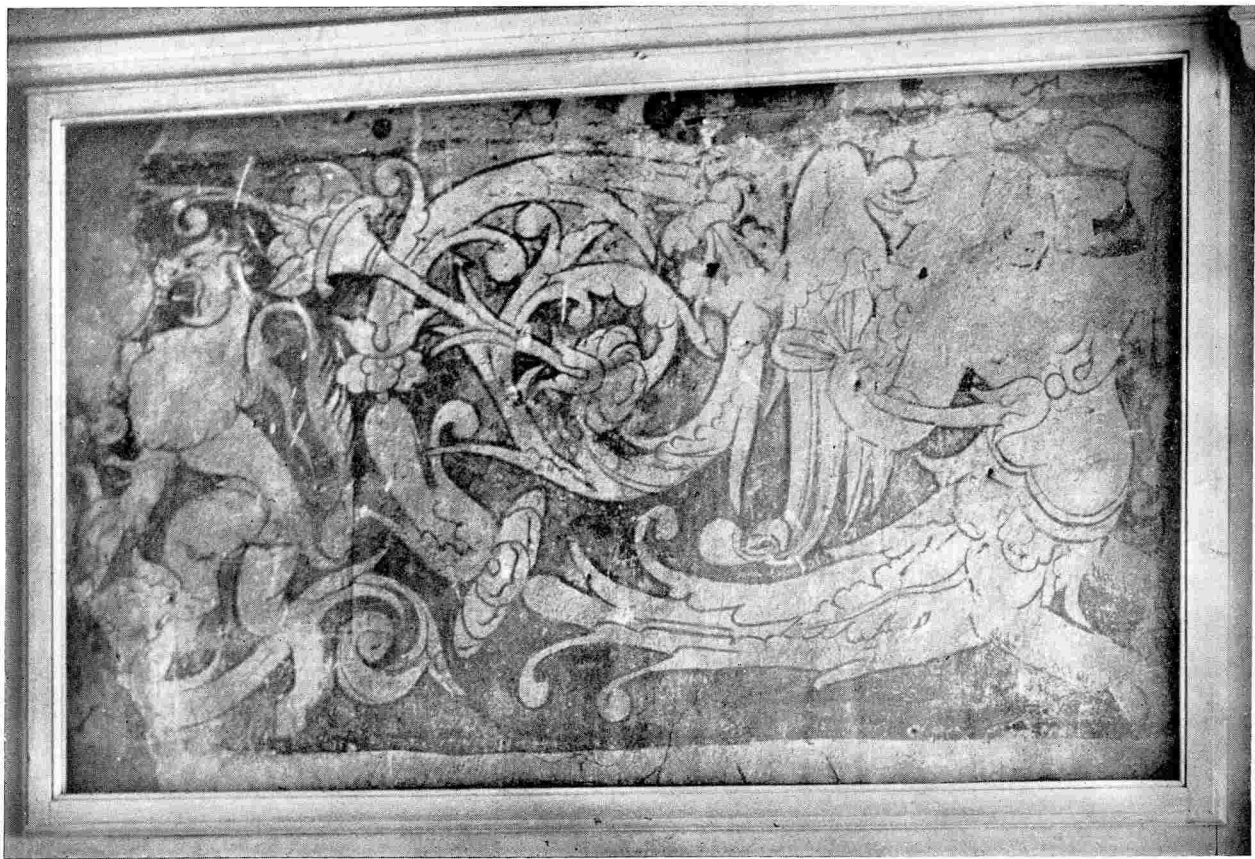


FIG. 1. WALL-PAINTING FORMERLY AT THE MANOR HOUSE, MILDENHALL, c. 1580.

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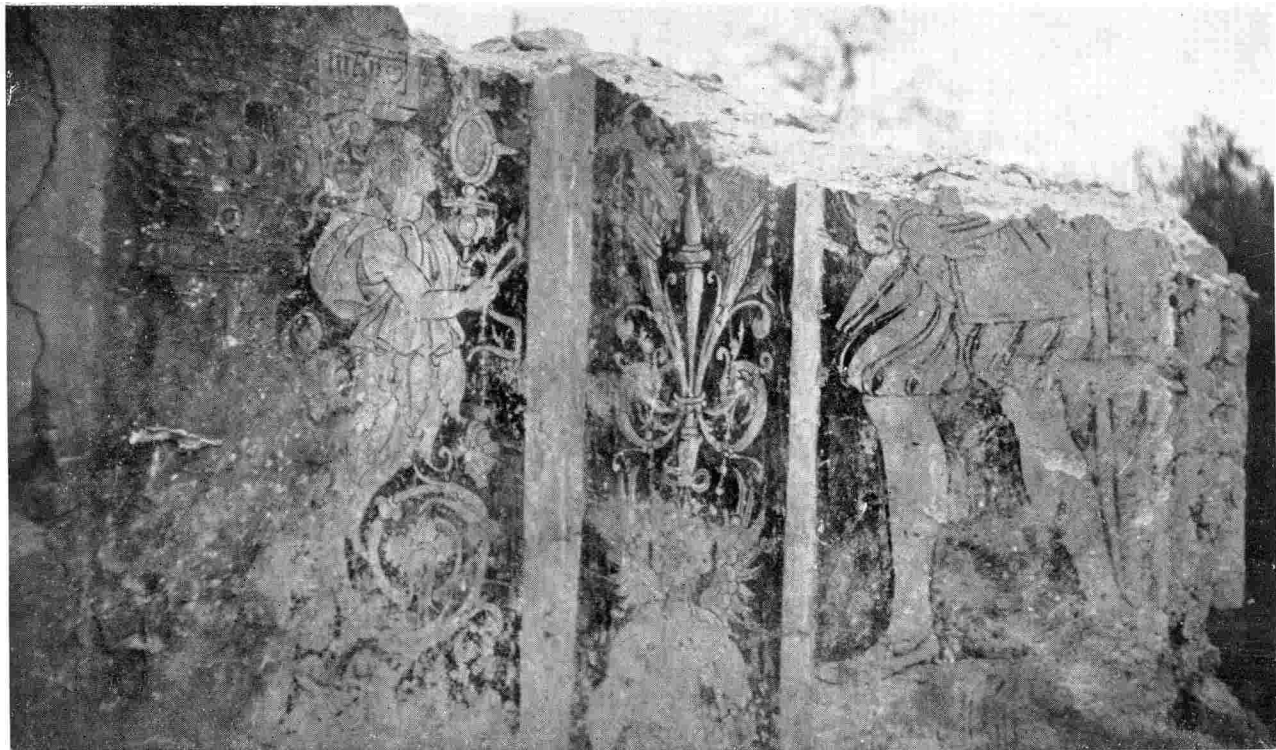


FIG. 2. WALL-PAINTING FORMERLY AT THE MANOR HOUSE, MILDENHALL. c. 1580.

Photograph by the Rev. L. H. Tyrrell Green.