

LIVERMERE PARVA: A MISSING HATCHMENT FOUND

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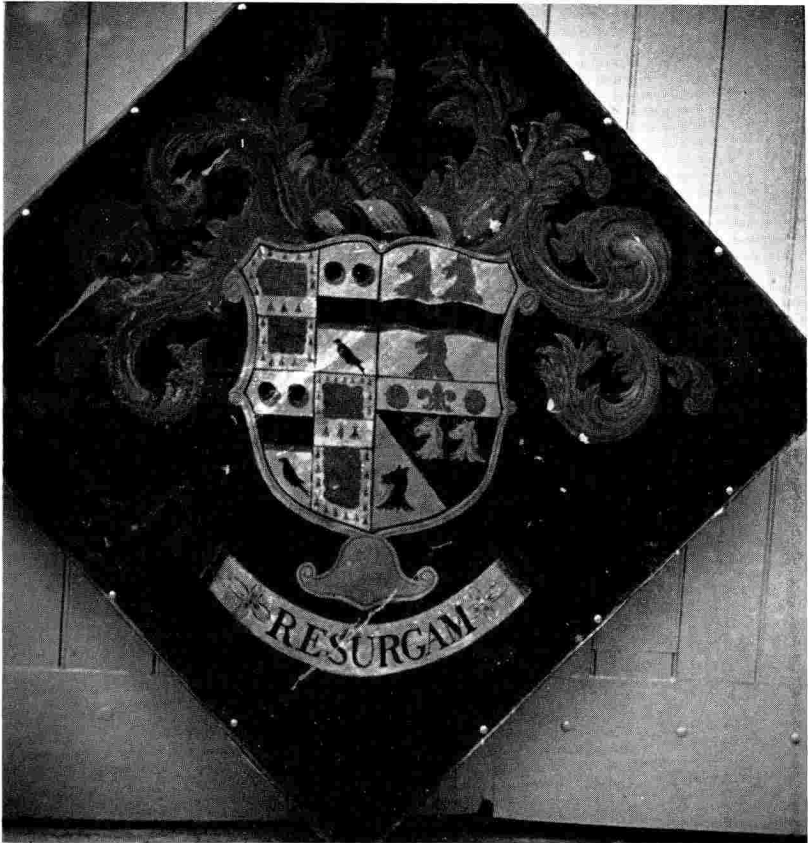
At a sale which took place in the stables at Shrubland Park on 11 November 1966, Lot 249 was described in the catalogue as 'Armorial hatchment painted in oils on canvas, with separate stretcher and frame.' Miss Corder and I inspected it before the sale and the following is a description of it:—

SHIELD:	Quarterly, 1 and 4	<i>Gules a fesse within a bordure engrailed ermine (ACTON)</i>
	2 and 3	<i>Argent a fesse between two roundels and a martlet sable (LEE)</i>
	impaling, in chief	<i>Argent a fesse wavy azure between three wolves' heads erased gules (MILLER)</i>
	in base	<i>Per bend or and azure [or sable] three griffons' erased counterchanged, on a chief argent a fleur-de-lys between two roses gules (RYCRAFT)</i>
CREST:		<i>An arm in armour enbowed holding a sword argent enfiled thereon a boar's head sable (ACTON)</i>
BACKGROUND:	All black	

The paint is rather dirty and this makes it difficult to distinguish between azure and sable. The hatchment measures about 4 ft. 6 ins. by 3 ft. 10 ins. (Plate XLV).

It commemorates the death of Nathaniel Lee Acton of Livermere Park who was born in 1757 and died 1 January 1836; he was buried at Little Livermere. He married, first, in 1787, Susanna daughter of Sir Thomas Miller, 5th Baronet of Chichester; she died 5 April and was buried 13 April 1789 at Little Livermere. He married, second, in 1791, Penelope daughter of the Revd. Sir Richard Nelson Rycroft, 1st Baronet, of Penshurst, Kent; she died 5 November 1819 and was buried at Little Livermere. Nathaniel Lee Acton left no issue and his large estates descended to his nephew, Sir William Fowle Middleton of Shrubland Park (son of his sister Harriot who

PLATE XLV



Livermere Parva, Lee Acton hatchment.

died 1852 aged 97); from him they passed, through the Brokes, to the Saumarez family, the present owners of Shrubland.¹

Since Nathaniel Acton was buried at Little Livermere (as were his two wives) one would expect to find his hatchment in that church. In fact, that is where it was about 1890–1900 when Edmund Farrer was compiling his *Suffolk Church Heraldry*,² where he describes it as being ‘in the Acton vault, down below’, but it is not mentioned in a detailed account of the church which was printed in 1925;³ this of course may be because it was still in the vault and therefore passed over, but on the other hand according to the present incumbent of the united benefice of Ampton and Ingham the church of Little Livermere has been in bad repair and out of use ‘for about fifty years.’ So the hatchment may have been removed when the church ceased to be used.

When these facts were pointed out to the Hon. J. V. B. Saumarez he readily agreed to withdraw the hatchment from the sale. Since it cannot go back to the ruined church of Little Livermere, it has been housed at Christchurch Mansion, Ipswich, with a note on its back recording its vicissitudes, as far as they are known.

But this is not the end of the story. Miss Corder has pointed out to me that there hangs in Stonham Aspal church a hatchment for Penelope (Rycroft) second wife of Nathaniel Acton; it bears the arms of LEE and ACTON impaling RYCROFT (as above), with the dexter half of the background white and the sinister half black, showing that it was the wife who had died. As we have seen, Penelope died in November 1819 and was buried at Little Livermere so it is difficult to account for the presence of her hatchment at Stonham Aspal. Farrer does not record it in either edition of his manuscript volumes, but the late Charles Partridge, who owned the illustrated edition after Farrer’s death in 1935, has added a note on page 159 of the Bosmere volume stating that it was ‘found in a builder’s yard at Stonham about 1915 by the rector, the Revd. A. W. Darwin.’ How it got to Stonham is a mystery, but evidently Mr. Darwin hung it in his church, where it has remained ever since. It is perhaps worth noting that the Saumarez family inherited the manor of Stonham Aspal as well as the Livermere property, through the marriage of the fourth Lord de Saumarez with the Broke heiress in 1882.

¹ For details of the Acton and Middleton families see: Page, *History of Suffolk*, p. 581; *E. A. N. & Q.*, vi, p. 371; *E. A. Misc.*, 1907, p. 88; Copinger, *Manors of Suffolk*, i, p. 347; ii, pp. 244, 260.

² Farrer compiled this survey during the last twenty years of the 19th century in twelve volumes, with coloured drawings of every shield. Later, he made an unillustrated copy in two volumes, with descriptions of the arms only. Both these editions are now in the Ipswich Public Library.

³ *E. A. Misc.*, 1925, pp. 35–42 *passim*. I am indebted to Miss Corder for this reference and for the photograph, taken in difficult conditions.

One can only assume that both hatchments were removed from Little Livermere church about 1915, when the church ceased to be used, and that one found its way to Stonham, while the other ended up at Shrublands.