

16th-century linenfold panelling and a canopy from the Neptune Inn, 86 Fore Street, Ipswich

Following the RFS July 2017 Conference visit to Christchurch Mansion, Ipswich, this article aims to describe related 16th-century oak panelling and a canopy from the former Neptune Inn, now in the Burrell Collection, Glasgow Museums (32.1, 32.2).

The panelling is composed of four sections with three rows of linenfold panels and an openwork carved Renaissance frieze, *c.* 1540, within a later moulded framework. Each panel is carved with a central deep fold and two lateral folds; both the upper and lower shaped ends of the folds are represented. The finely carved Renaissance frieze is of scrolling ribbon tracery with grotesque dolphin heads, masks and fountains.

86 Fore Street is a 15th- and early 16th-century hall house, altered in 1639. It was one of several substantial merchants' houses that fronted onto Fore Street and stretched back to the medieval wharves on the River Orwell. The Suffolk cloth trade, general trade and shipbuilding were the source of the town's prosperity until the late 17th century, when the removal of the Customs to Harwich caused a decline. By the early 18th century the house was leased out to tenants; it became



One of the sections of panelling. The Burrell Collection (32.1)
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Detail of carved frieze and linenfold panels, oak (32.1).
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the Neptune Inn around 1770. There was a long tradition of trade between the port of Ipswich and Flanders and the panels are probably Flemish in origin. The addition of imported Renaissance ornament brought a fashionable element to the otherwise traditional linenfold, indicating not only mercantile wealth but also an educated taste.

Several 19th-century antiquarians recorded the picturesque architecture of the exterior of the Neptune Inn. Evelyn White wrote of 'the rooms being rich in oak carving, wainscoted and ceiled.'¹ Taylor illustrated and described 'the most notable part ... the present tap-room. The quay labourers sit over their beer in a carved-ceiled, oak panelled room.'² Drawings dated 1909, published by Oliver, represent the carving in detail.³ Roe was the first furniture historian to publish an account, commenting on the quality of the carving: 'in its club-room at the back of the premises a magnificent run of linen panelling ... with oblong panels carved with exquisite arabesques', though it was thickly coated in paint.

Roe illustrated another item in the house, a canopy fixed high on the wall in the solar chamber, though confusingly he referred to it as a dresser, 'adorned with linen panels and projecting heads in medallions, let into the wall and surmounted with a pierced cornice in the style of the early Renaissance.'⁴ This is the Burrell canopy (32.2), which would seem to be a composite piece, re-created in the 19th century.

Cescinsky and Gribble recorded the removal of the panelling from the Neptune Inn in 1913 for John D. Cobbold (1861–1929), of Holy Wells, who 'has gathered together a very fine collection of elaborate panellings and woodwork, taken from Ipswich inns and houses.'⁵ Both panelling and canopy were installed in the dining room. John D. Cobbold inherited Holy Wells from his grandfather, John C. Cobbold (1797–1882), brewer and MP for Ipswich. John C. had also been a collector, removing the panelling from the Tudor Great Parlour of



Coved canopy, oak (32.2). ©CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection

the Tankard Inn, originally Wingfield House. MacCulloch and Blatchly have identified Henry Ringham, woodcarver and church furnisher, as employed in 1856 to strip out the panelling, repair it and install it in the study at Holy Wells.⁶

Following John D. Cobbold's death, the house and contents were sold by Knight, Frank & Rutley, with the Ipswich auctioneers Garrod, Turner & Son, on 9–10 April 1930.⁷ Lot 1, the Dining Room, included the Neptune Inn panelling and canopy. A section of the panelling, two linenfold panels wide, was acquired for Ipswich Museum from Frederick Tibbenham Ltd, an Ipswich manufacturer of period furniture including panelling and ecclesiastical woodwork.⁸ The firm may have purchased the entire lot. The canopy and lengths of panelling now in the Burrell seem to have been acquired, perhaps soon after the sale, by an agent acting for William Randolph Hearst for St Donat's Castle in

Glamorgan. In August 1952 they were bought for £500 by Sir William Burrell through the dealer Murray Adams-Acton, an agent for Hearst's National Magazine Company, London.

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¹ Rev. C. H. Evelyn White, 'The old inns and taverns of Ipswich ...', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology & Natural History*, vi/2 (1886), p. 174

² J. E. Taylor, *In and about ancient Ipswich ...* illustrations by Percy E. Stimpson (Norwich & London: Jarrold and Sons, 1888), p. 114-15, plate facing p. 115.

³ Basil Oliver, *Old houses and village buildings in East Anglia, Norfolk, Suffolk & Essex* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1912), p. 93: figs 70, 71 'measured drawings' by Alan Binning ARIBA.

⁴ Fred Roe, *Old Oak Furniture* (London: Methuen & Co., 1905), 190-91, 255-56. Two signed pencil drawings dated 13.2.1904 are in the Geffrye Museum archive of Roe's papers, nos. 60-1994 229 and 230.

⁵ H. Cescinsky and E. R. Gribble, *Early English Furniture and Woodwork*, vol. 1 (London: G. Routledge, 1922), p. 269, figs 283-84.

⁶ Diarmaid MacCulloch and John Blatchly, 'A house fit for a Queen: Wingfield House in Tacket Street, Ipswich and its heraldic room'. *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History*, vol. 38, 1996, p. 13.

⁷ Ipswich Record Office, HD2833/1/SC242/80

⁸ Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service: IPSMG: R.1930-63.2. I am grateful to Emma Roodhouse and Eleanor Root for their assistance.