

# New light on the Ordsall Hall Bed

In the Autumn 2014 issue of the *RFS Newsletter* I published a short report on the sixteenth-century bed made for Sir John Radcliffe of Ordsall Hall, Salford, which at that time was destined for a private collection. Since then the new owner has loaned it to Ordsall Hall where it is on display to the public. The bed bears the



The Ordsall Hall bed, photographed before its sale in 2014.  
Bonhams



The bed photographed in George Shaw's house in Uppermill, 1920. *Saddleworth Museum*

arms of Sir John Radcliffe (c. 1536–89) and his wife Anne Asshawe (1545–1627), who were married about 1572, but it was catalogued as having 'later additions'. Subsequent research has revealed not only which parts have been added or modified, but also the identity of the man responsible – the architect, antiquarian and faker, George Shaw of Uppermill, near Oldham.

In May 1848 Shaw (1810–76) was embroiled in a dispute with Algernon Percy, 4th Duke of Northumberland (1792–1865), to whom he had sold a collection of oak furniture said to have come from an old Percy stronghold, Wressle Castle in the East Riding of Yorkshire. In fact it had been made in Shaw's Uppermill workshop. In an attempt to uncover the truth, the Duke sent emissaries to Uppermill to find out more about Shaw and his activities, one of whom was a man named Richard Burd. Burd called on Shaw at his home in Uppermill and was given a tour of his house and collection, in the course of which he was shown 'a magnificent bed'. He described the two coats of arms on the headboard belonging to '... two families of Radcliffe (once of Ordsall Hall near Manchester) ...', and the arms on the footboard relating to Harrington and





The royal arms in the centre of the tester. *Bonhams*

Trafford flanking Sir John Radcliffe's in the centre.<sup>1</sup> Any doubt that the bed Richard Burd saw was the Ordsall Hall bed is dispelled by a photograph taken in 1920, when the contents of Shaw's house were put up for sale. The photo also reveals that the bed's cornice had carved crestings on three sides and obelisk finials at the corners.

Shaw admitted to Burd that the bed had been 'put together'. His interest lay in the Radcliffe connection, because his mother was Elizabeth Radcliffe and he attached great importance to that lineage. By comparing the bed to Shaw's known work at Warkworth Castle and elsewhere we can suggest that only the headboard and parts of the tester are original, dating from some time after Sir John Radcliffe's marriage in 1572. The footboard is made from the front of a seventeenth-century joined chest with arms carved on the panels by Shaw's workshop. On top is another set of arms with an earl's coronet and bull supporters. These relate to another branch of the Radcliffe family, the Barons Fitzwalter, and were probably intended to be the arms of Robert Radcliffe (d. 1542), created 1st Earl of Sussex in 1529. The paired bulls are repeated, together with the earl's coronet, in the frieze of the tester, which indicates that the frieze and cornice are also Shaw additions. In the centre of the tester are the royal arms of Henry VIII added by Shaw in place of the original panel. Finally, the footposts are wholly bogus and must also be by Shaw.

Given the anachronisms and heraldic errors, together with Shaw's candid admission that the bed had been 'put together', it is clear that Shaw did not intend his bed to be regarded as wholly genuine. Rather, it was a bit of



Detail of the carved footposts. *Bonhams*

fun, combining genuine parts of real antiquarian value with newly made additions which created spurious connections to royalty and minor nobility. It perfectly embodies Shaw's belief that the antiquarian's role was to interpret and revive medieval England in spirit rather than archaeological fact. If genuine artefacts did not fully embody that spirit then they could legitimately be improved until they did.

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<sup>1</sup> Alnwick Castle Archives, DP:D4/I/99, Richard Burd to Edward Burd, 10 May 1848.