

Bishop Lloyd's Palace

A Grade 1 Listed building in the heart of Chester



HISTORY MONOGRAPH No 3 – BISHOP LLOYD'S PALACE STREET FRONTAGE

The front of Bishop Lloyd's Palace is an exceptionally beautiful and unique example of Tudor and Jacobean workmanship. It deserves to be more widely known and better understood.

One of the great delights of Bishop Lloyd's Palace is the magnificent programme of carvings decorating its street frontage. This contributes a lot to its grade 1 Listing.

The postcard above pre-dates the restoration by T. M. Lockwood in 1899. The Georgian modernization removed the timber framing at street chamber level.

Those changing the front of the house in the eighteenth century kept its carvings. There was recognition that these were unique and beautiful even in the midst of the contemporary desire for modernization.

The full programme of the decoration done in the early seventeenth century cannot be now known.



Victorian postcard



Louise Raynor watercolour.

Louise Raynor's watercolour captures her pleasure in these early carvings, but not that those at the attic level differ substantially from those immediately above the Rows. We do not know whether the seventeenth century decorations at street chamber level followed



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the style of the attic carvings or those above the Row. It is possible that this level had little or no decoration. It may even have followed a programme of its own.

Lockwood's restoration of the windows at street chamber level was more influenced by the late seventeenth century fenestration of a building such as The Bear and Billet than the smaller windows, which would have been more likely to be used in late Elizabethan timber framing.

ATTIC LEVEL DECORATION

The attic level decoration is a flamboyant delight of low relief work owing more to the Gothic than the Renaissance. Even when Lockwood changed the fenestration he retained the symmetry of the original work.

This programme of decoration on an already imposing three storeys' house cried out the importance of the property.

Symmetrical pairings are used. At the narrowest part of the gable incline are two paired figures in panels. They both adopt the same pose,. We could be looking at grotesques or equally a playful exploration of possible new races. Both Roman and contemporary explorers had written of these in their travelogues. Sir Walter Raleigh had told of a Guyanian race, whose faces were in their torsos. The Sciapods were said to be one legged Ethiopians, who sheltered under their one gigantic foot.

On the next level of the gable are four panels. On the left hand side next to the window the panel contains a face. The lack of foliage means that this is not a green man. The other three have paired imaginary creatures. On the left hand side the creatures face away from each other. They appear to be based on seahorses. On the right hand side they face each other, and seem to be dolphin and dog/bear like.

There is a decorated panel of 10 shapes immediately below the window. There is then a series of eight highly decorated panels divided by caryatids. The one furthest right is wearing a ruff. All of them take a different form.



Decoration at attic level – highest carvings.



Decoration at attic level – highest carvings.

These would have been the most difficult for the passer by to see, but the quality still is excellent.



Above street chamber



Above street chamber



Above street chamber

These would be more visible from the street. Each panel has a complex form. The panels have an arch about a third of the way from the top. The larger relief is under the beaded arch, but there is further decoration above the arch. Those above the arches are eight differing symmetrical patterns. One does contain an angel, and another appears to be a dog's head.

Those below seem to be very influenced by medieval bestiaries. The representations are: a figure in a similar posture to those at the top of the gable ; a face topped by a headdress: an elephant and castle, topped by a cross with the heads of two creatures staring at it; an amphisbaena with horns and its dual heads facing away from each other; a bear/dog wearing a collar, but with no staff; a head with two beaked creatures at ear level; an amphisbaena without horns and its dual heads facing each other facing each other and a wyvern/lion.

The bestiaries were collections of creatures both real and imagined. The creature would be illustrated. This would be followed by a description of its habits. A religious meaning was then frequently assigned to it.



Page from a Bestiary

The wood carver might never have seen an actual bestiary, although at this period there was a flurry of printed bestiaries becoming available. There would be examples of such creatures in churches since the twelfth century. They appeared in the margins of texts, tapestries and maps. The ones above likely to have had their inspiration from such sources would be the elephant and castle, the amphisbaenae, the lion/wyvern and the idea of strange humanoids.



Chester Cathedral, the elephant and castle

The animals from the bestiaries sometimes were adopted into heraldry. The elephant and castle is associated with the Corbett family and became part of the Guild of Cutlers coat of arms.

The bear (or dog) is not from a bestiary. Bears would be a frequent sight in the towns, and with a staff it also formed part of the livery of the Earls of Shrewsbury. Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, shared a common ancestry with the Talbots and he too used this device. He had been a Lord Chamberlain of Chester during Elizabeth's reign. There is no staff in this panel.

Some commentators have referred to this sequence of carvings as being heraldic. It certainly is not. Neither does there seem to be a narrative in the sequence.

As the bestiaries did frequently give religious significance to the creatures in them, it would be possible to attempt to give a religious reading of some of the images. This has been done in the instance of church misericords. It would seem to be a mistake here. They are too various. They are there to give delight to observant passers by.

They could be seen to have a maritime reference with their focus on alien animals and people.

What is stranger is their lack of reference to Renaissance motifs. The caryatids could be seen as classical, and grotesques in form. Otherwise neither the craftsman nor his patron seemed to wish to portray classical gods, virtues or stories.

They are close in style to the humanoid creatures holding up the jettied chamber room at Row Level +1. The original placing and figures can be seen in the illustration from 1848. Lockwood in 1899 changed their locations and added another series of smaller figures.

The next illustration shows an original figure with a smaller Lockwood figure. The original figures are large well-endowed men. There is a bawdy humour about them. Giants did form part of the Midsummer Watch Parade in Chester

Although holding up part of the building they are not caryatids. The angle at which they are placed gives a nautical impression of a ship's figurehead.

Behind them are carved various animals. These are not the bestiary figures of the attic level, but indigenous creatures. The most distinctive of these is an owl. The others are less distinguishable. There appear to be a calf and a fox or perhaps a lamb: the skins of these were staple exports from Chester in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.



Photograph of Watergate Rows in 1848 prior to Lockwood's alteration



Large and small figures on Rows

STREET CHAMBER LEVEL

The sequence of eight panels below the street chamber window is very different to those of the attic programme. Here each image has its own panel, which is not divided in any way. Neither

is the choice of subject matter in anyway fantastical nor are there divisions between the panels marked by grotesques or caryatids.

STREET CHAMBER LEVEL :
COMMEMORATIVE PANELS: A BISHOP AND
SOME MERCHANTS

Assuming that these panels are original to the building the cartouche on the panel, which is fifth from the left gives us our first actual date for the building.



George Lloyd's heraldic arms as Bishop of Sodor and Man

The association of George Lloyd with the building is bound up with this panel. There is no other extant documentation. The central heraldic device is *unique* to Bishop Lloyd. It is his personal diocesan heraldry. The bishop's mitre tops the coat of arms and indicates his status. Under the mitre is the symbol of the bishopric of the Isle of Man on the dexter of the shield (to our left) and on the sinister (to our right) is George Lloyd's personal emblem, three horse's heads. No-one else, including members of his family, would be entitled to use this coat of arms.

George Lloyd was Bishop of Sodor and Man from January 1600 to January 1605. He would not have used such a device prior to this date. After January 1605 he was translated to Bishop of Chester. From then on his heraldic device was his own arms on the sinister, as here, but the diocesan heraldry of Chester on the dexter. This consisted of three further bishops' mitres. At the top would be a mitre, indicating his status.

After the death of his eldest brother in 1605/6 he used his family arms on the sinister. These consisted of three mullets (the rowel of a spur,

looking like a star/jellyfish) with a chevron and a black lion rampant. He had portrait of himself painted at this time. It can be seen in the Grosvenor Museum. In the upper left-hand corner of the painting can be seen his coat of arms as Bishop of Chester.

In the top left hand corner of this panel are the arms of England and Wales.

The arms in the bottom left-hand corner are those of the Stanley family, who were Lords of Man, and in whose power was this bishopric. From 1594 the Stanleys were involved in a legal dispute as to whom should be the next Lord of Man. The arms are included here to indicate that eventually the bishopric and island would be returned to them. Queen Elizabeth I appointed Doctor Lloyd to this bishopric, as she was the 'protectoress' of the island until the Stanley dispute was resolved. The then Lord Chamberlain of Chester, Thomas Egerton, was deeply involved with one faction of the Stanley dispute. His Chester home was behind Bishop Lloyd's Palace in the now White Friars' area.

The two crests to the right are a more puzzling inclusion. The upper crest is that of the Merchant Adventurers. Chester was incorporated into this in 1554. In Chester the term used for such overseas merchants was 'meere merchants'. They kept a separate existence to other guilds in the town. Neither retail nor manual masters could form part of their company. The charter was renewed in 1559 and 1581. In 1589 it was decided that non-manual masters, retailers, could become part of the group. This was presumably if their business linked them to maritime trade. Thomas Egerton had also had strong associations with the Merchant Adventurers since the beginning of his legal career.

The lower crest is that of a well-established Chester family in Tudor times, the Goodman's. David Lloyd, an elder brother of George Lloyd, had been Sheriff of Chester when William Goodman was mayor.. David's first wife was Alice Goodman.

The likely date of this panel is between January 1600 and March 1603, the death of Elizabeth I. An earlier date is the more likely. The cartouche would be used to identify where Bishop Lloyd could be contacted in Chester. Chester was an embarkation and disembarkation point for the

Isle of Man. Dr. Lloyd's actual residence, his Bishop's Palace, was at Bishops court on the island. He also spent time at his parish in Heswall, as the baptism dates of his children show.

There is only one record of his having actually been on the island. This shows his presence in a consistory court there in 1603. No doubt he would have visited more frequently, but at this time the island's bishops did not reside there. 1603.

George Lloyd had family contacts in Chester. His parish was nearby. It was convenient for visitors from the island to call at Chester to keep him informed of matters Manx. This was possibly his residence in Chester, and certainly where he could be contacted. It had to be sufficiently grand to give audiences to his visitors. It was not his 'palace'. This was in the Isle of Man.

Once he was Bishop of Chester he would have the Bishop's Palace in the cathedral precincts from where to give audiences. He continued to live in Heswall and later Thornton-le-Moors where he died.

What is certain is that whoever put up this plaque saw as the house's greatest honour its connection with George Lloyd. The two crests on the right hand side support this association. The crests to the left are more problematic. They associate the house with the Goodman family and the Merchant Adventurers. Certainly the Meere Merchants of Chester would have needed an independent meeting place. The Merchant Adventurer/ Goodman/ Lloyd connections remain a conundrum.

STREET CHAMBER LEVEL: **COMMEMORATIVE PANELS: GOD BLESS** **THE PRINCE OF WALES**



A panel celebrating the Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester.

The panel fourth from our left strongly suggests that George Lloyd continued to have a connection with this house in Watergate Street even after he became Bishop of Chester. It is from the reign of James I. The central image is the Tudor Rose of England surrounded by the Garter and its legend Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense. The letters IR are on either side of the panel, indicating the reign of James I, Iacobus Rex. This began in March 1603.

George Lloyd was given his promotion to Bishop of Chester by James I. James was a Calvinist, as was Lloyd. Quite quickly after James arrived in England Lloyd had begun to work on the royal genealogies in London to check that they were dynastically correct. In this panel James is linked securely back to the Plantagenets.

The upper corners show us an iconography reminiscent of King's College Chapel, Cambridge. Dr. Lloyd would have known this well, having spent twenty years at this university to eventually gain his qualification as a Doctor of Divinity.

There is the Plantagenet Fleur de Lys to our left and to our right a crowned portcullis. The crowned portcullis was the emblem of Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII. She was the great-grandmother of Elizabeth I and the great-great-great-grandmother of James I.

She also takes the Tudor and Stuart dynasties to their Welsh roots. George Lloyd and James I shared an ancestor in the Welsh chieftain, Ednyfed Fychan.

It is the symbols in the lower corners, which give a date to the panel. They are the Prince of Wales feathers and the shield of the Earl of Chester. Both these titles are received together. A new Earl of Chester would have been a remarkable event. The last prince to receive this honour had been Henry VIII's son, Edward, in 1537.

James I's elder son, Henry Fredrick, was invested with these titles in 1610. He died unexpectedly in 1612, and so there was only a short period when this panel could have been decorated.

The whole of Chester celebrated his new honours with a pageant on St George's Day. As

St George he defeated the dragon and green men. There was a classical allegorical masque as part of the proceedings with fireworks as Mercury descended from heaven to express the immortal gods pleasure at Henry's new titles.

Henry was the great Calvinist hope for the future. He was an active Calvinist. With the stability of James' reign followed by Henry's reign clerics, such as Lloyd, were hoping that Calvinist doctrines would be actively adhered to in the three countries. This panel suggests that Lloyd still had a connection to the house in that it celebrates a new Calvinist Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester. Occupying panels four and five these two commemorative would sit centrally with three panels on either side.

In 1616 James' second son was made Prince of Wales and Earl of Chester. On his visit to Chester in 1617 James announced the appointment again. Charles was not as charismatic as Henry and not as well known. His commitment to Calvinism was not strong as had been Henry's. In 1617 James I was feted in the city as he announced this new Earl of Chester. By 1616 George Lloyd had died. It is certainly possible that this panel was put in place then.

At either side of the two panels just described are three other panels. This would place these two commemorative panels centrally on the house. Their centrality and importance would not be compromised by the six remaining panels being decorated in a differing unified style.

STREET CHAMBER LEVEL : **COMMEMORATIVE PANELS: A LATIN ENIGMA**

However the panel sixth from our right is another commemorative piece. It is the only panel containing a date, but it still creates a puzzle in understanding its significance.

The first thing to notice is that it differs from the other two panels so far discussed, because it is a panel within a panel. It has a face above it and two watch towers to either side. This opens the question as to whether the dated panel is actually placed over another image.

The writing is becoming increasingly difficult to read, because of its age and position. The words appear to be,

'FORMA DAT ESSE REI INTUS UT INCUTE, AN DOMINE 1615.'

The year 1615 must have been significant in some way to place a panel here, even possibly covering an image to do so. Bishop Lloyd died in August 1615, but he was also alive for seven months of that year. Whatever was being commemorated was important.



The dated panel

The writing is a quotation from Thomas Aquinas, the renowned *Catholic* theologian and scholar. Loosely this translates that the form matter takes gives an item its structure and therefore its nature both internally and externally.

It is highly unlikely to be a reference to the bishop's death. Aquinas believed that at the final resurrection souls would be reunited with their bodies. As a Calvinist Doctor Lloyd would believe that the soul left the body and the body corrupted. Such a commemoration would usually include a name and often a birth date.

It may be a playful reference to the house now being finished both inside and outside – its form was a construction of matter to create its design and function.

The plasterwork in the street chamber could have finally been finished at this date. It commemorates a long and gradual process of rebuilding, reshaping and refurbishing this ornate town house.

What is clear is that the quotation is placed on the building in Latin, and not English. The quotation is erudite and would demand knowledge of Aquinas. At this date the only likely

candidates to have chosen it would be clerics. The building has to have an ecclesiastical association either directly or indirectly.

STREET CHAMBER LEVEL: STORY PANELS

The five remaining panels indicate narratives. Unlike at the attic level they are all placed within a whole panel and not one is divided by an arch. None are fantastical: they all clearly refer to a story. Yet even here there are puzzles. The stories of the first three on the viewer's left-hand side are: Adam and Eve; Cain and Abel and Abraham and Isaac. The choice of stories on the viewer's right-hand side is more problematic.



Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel

STREET CHAMBER LEVEL: STORY PANELS : OLD TESTAMENT

The first three stories illustrated are well known Biblical tales. All three had formed part of the Chester Mystery Cycle. This had been abandoned in 1575.

The first panel to our left is Adam and Eve. They are about to be expelled from the Garden of Eden. An angel with a fiery sword is poking through the clouds to the right of the panel.

A number of animals can be seen in the garden. To the left there is a stag and what looks to be a crocodile or rhinoceros. At the base of the tree of knowledge two other creatures linger. To our right are definitely an elephant's head and possibly a camel and monkey.

In between the two figures is the Tree of Knowledge with the serpent still circling it. Eve still holds the apple. Innocence has just been lost, as the figures try to cover their nakedness. Humanity has fallen: the covenant between Man and God has been broken for the first time.

In the second panel the first crime occurs. Cain kills Abel with a realistic looking crowbar.



Abraham and Isaac

The third panel is lovely in its detail. Abraham is about to sacrifice his son Isaac, as he has been instructed by God. Abraham even has his sleeves rolled up to do the deed and holds his son's head as he lies praying on the altar. A very heavily clad angel is instructing him to cease with the sacrifice. Under a tree is the animal, which is to be sacrificed instead of his son. God has intervened to save Abraham's son. He will not be sacrificed.

It reflects us forward to God's own sacrifice of his son.

This panel gives us a glimpse of contemporary fashions for men. Both man and boy wear knee length breeches with jerkins and hose. The faces in this panel (and panel 7) have neat beards, moustaches and ear-length hair. Interestingly here there is a glimpse of the Renaissance with the columned altar. The clothes and altar put us early in the seventeenth century.

STREET CHAMBER LEVEL: STORY PANELS: A WOMAN'S VIRTUE

The next two illustrated panels are different in their choice of subject matter. The second panel

from the viewer's right is Susannah and the Elders.

There may, of course, be an image in the series missing next to this panel, but covered by the dated panel.

The naked Susannah is bathing in her garden. The fountain spews out water. She is watched by the two Elders. The face of one Elder peeps out from a tree. The other one is fully shown. We see them, but Susannah appears not to see them. They later try to besmirch her honour, having unsuccessfully tried to blackmail her into submission to them.



Susannah and the Elders.

Later in the story Daniel is able to show Susannah's innocence by judicious questioning of the Elders based on the tree clearly shown in the panel.

The panel could be linked to the Cain and Abel story. Man has fallen and commits crimes. It is incumbent upon the civil authorities to provide justice for everyone on earth. In spite of being woman Susannah's innocence is proven, and the significant male citizens are shown to be lewd liars.

This story was eventually removed from the book of Daniel. This is a Greek intrusion in a Hebrew text and was later regarded as apocryphal.

The next panel is a particularly unusual choice. It has been thought to show one of the seven sorrows of Mary. Mary appears to be lying on a bed and a sword is piercing her heart. If this interpretation was correct then it would be the only panel, which is metaphorical. The other narratives were believed to be historical.

It was thought to illustrate what Simeon prophesied to Mary in the Temple, 'a sword shall pierce through thine soul also'.

Simeon was speaking of the crucifixion. The sword with its hilt also visually reflects a cross.

This could be paired with the panel of Abraham and Isaac. God will sacrifice *his* son for mankind. However to see it as one of the seven sorrows of Mary gives us two problems. Firstly, the panel would be using Marian iconography in a Protestant city. Secondly, the figure is *literally* stabbing herself. The woman's hand is clutching the sword above the hilt as she sits on her bed.

What we actually have here is a departure from a Biblical source. The panel daringly moves into the classical world.

The Roman matron, Lucretia, is raped by an Etruscan prince. When he leaves her bed, she immediately takes a sword and stabs herself to show to the world her virtue and innocence. This was said to lead to the fall of the monarchy in Rome.

However it is not its republican political suggestions, which seem to be important here. When linked with the story of Susannah we have two stories, which show virtuous women being lewdly treated by powerful men. The important point is that they are innocent of these sexual besmirching of their characters.

The artist, Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 – 1653), depicted strong women in her paintings. They are often revenging wrongs done. She painted the Susannah story a number of times and also Lucretia. These two stories were seen as part of a hagiography of virtuous women.

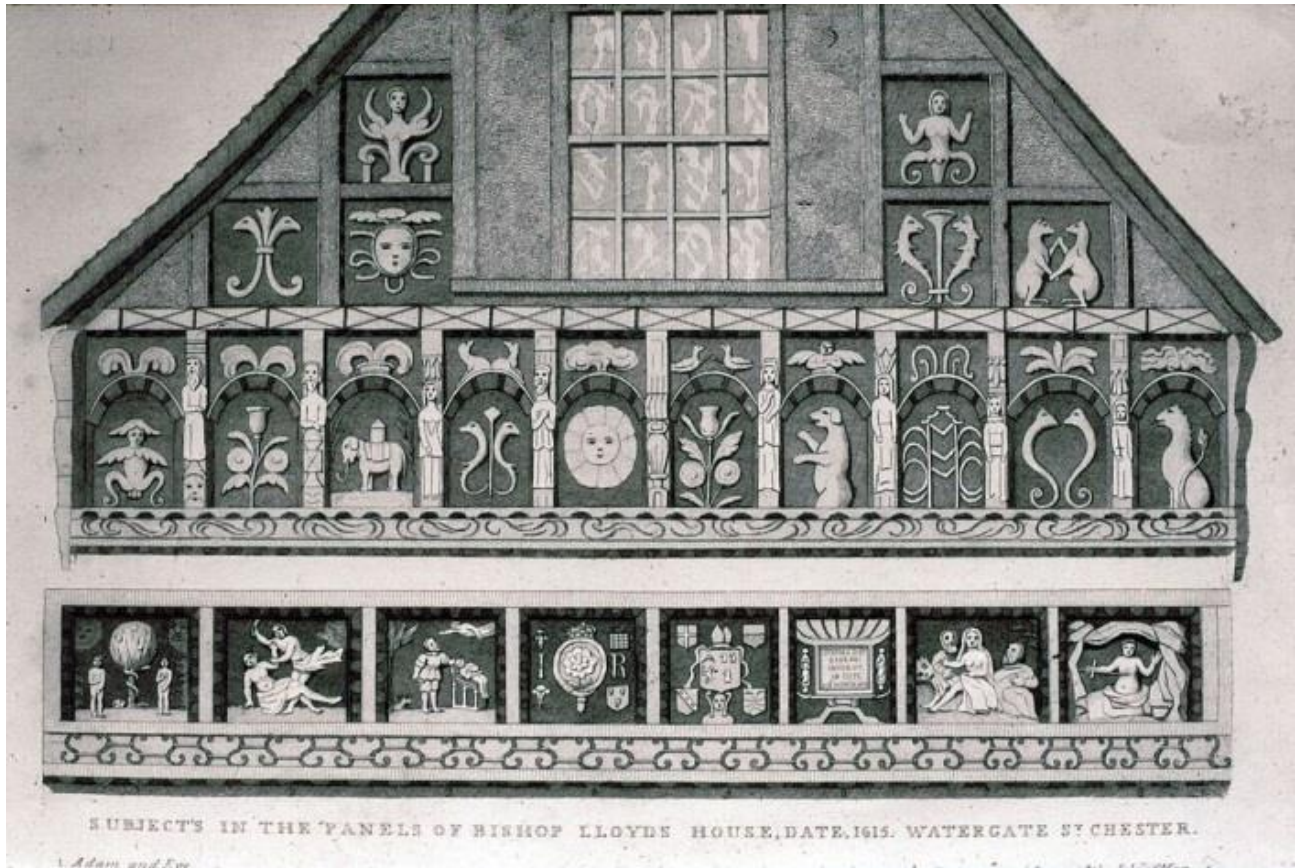


Lucretia's suicide

What we seem to have in these two final panels is a break from the Biblical tradition of the earlier three panels, and a patron choosing stories defending women against sexual calumnies. This could suggest two different educated patrons choosing the panels for differing reasons.

There is also another significant feature here. The patron of the virtuous women panels has moved in the final panel from Biblical stories into the classical era. We have a full blown Renaissance reference on the building.

The Beautiful House - Preserve It !



The carvings on Bishop Lloyd's Palace from an early twentieth century postcard

Bishop Lloyd's Palace is remarkable in many ways. The street frontage is particularly beautiful and its preservation is imperative. It appears to have been more highly appreciated in other eras than it has been in our own although its decorations have always marked it out as a building associated with important personages in the city.

The building shows English artisan provincial Renaissance work weaving Gothic influences into the new artistic concerns. Two distinct programmes of decoration have been identified. and within the street chamber level decoration there are differences in the types of panels. It is also a tantalizing conundrum of mysteries around its property ownership and the reasons for the varying choices of decorations.

Karen McKay