



HEVER CASTLE
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CHILDHOOD HOME OF ANNE BOLEYN

A BED OF ROSES



THE MARRIAGE BED OF
HENRY VII AND ELIZABETH OF YORK

4 March – 22 November 2015

INTRODUCTION

Hever Castle is delighted to be exhibiting a late medieval bed on loan from the Langley Collection in the 'Bed of Roses' exhibition. Believed to have been the marriage bed of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, it is possibly the only piece of furniture to survive from the Tudor Palace of Westminster.

Discovered in 2010 and acquired by Ian Coulson, owner of the Langley Collection, the bed will be displayed at Hever Castle throughout much of 2015. The Langley Collection features fine and rare period furniture, with items for the collection selected on the basis of exceptional design, rarity, proportion and provenance.

In this leaflet Dr Jonathan Foyle, TV historian and journalist, sets forth the results of his extensive research into this fascinating medieval royal bed. He outlines the various symbols believed to be apparent in the piece, and identifies why this is persuasive evidence towards its Tudor royal origins.

You can follow Dr Jonathan Foyle on Twitter: @JonathanFoyle

Please note: Hever Castle accepts no responsibility for the authenticity of the claims set out in this leaflet – these are the views of Dr Jonathan Foyle based on his extensive research into the subject.

A BED OF ROSES

THE MARRIAGE BED OF HENRY VII AND ELIZABETH OF YORK



This exhibition presents the surviving parts of a spectacularly carved late medieval oak bed frame discovered in 2010, with evidence for its attribution as the marriage bed of Henry VII (1485-1509) and Elizabeth of York (1485-1503).

This exceptional survivor is England's only medieval royal bed.

Its symbolism reveals how Henry and Elizabeth viewed themselves as they began a 117-year long dynasty that transformed England. They present themselves as saviours to conclude their families' civil war: 'The Wars of the Roses'. As the image of Christ and the Virgin Mary they triumph over evil as they overturned the sins of Adam and Eve. These figures are surrounded by biblical themes and medieval fertility symbols.

Evidence suggests the bed was made for the Painted Chamber of Westminster Palace for the marriage ceremony at Westminster Abbey on 18th January 1486. Until 1512, this lost ceremonial bedchamber was the innermost sanctum of the medieval monarchy.

Remarkably, the bed's distinctive carved details and decorative finish are matched in a newly discovered set of wall-posts with royal symbols, which sets the bed within the context of a contemporary Anglo-German royal workshop.



A BED OF ROSES

HOW OLD IS THE BED?

TIMBER

DNA testing of the timber has proved that all samples from posts, lion finials and headboard are European oak and of a subspecies ('haplotype 7') found in an area stretching from southern France, through southern Germany to Belarus. This is typical of the origin of the finest, slow-grown oak imported by medieval elites: Edward III used boards from Latvia for his bed in 1360.



©Double Helix, Distribution of haplotype 7 across Europe suggests the wood most likely came from the continent

A recent study showed that most fifteenth-century Baltic oak boards were a maximum of 33cm (13ins) wide. And it is the maximum width of the crests and headboard panels of this bed.

Medieval England had no powered sawmills. Its knotty oak was manually cut, and less regular than early continental mechanised sawing would allow. English beds do not match its high quality.

INTEGRITY

The uniformity of the 'haplotype 7' European oak reveals one source for its timber: this suggests a single original object rather than a composition of salvaged pieces. Also, the joints are articulated- there are no features typical of reused materials. Strikingly, the surfaces of all the original parts of the frame are covered with the same paint treatment.

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HOW OLD IS THE BED?

PAINT

The age of the bed is revealed by the remains of its historic paintwork. Under the varnish, traces of late medieval decoration have been found. A textured coal primer supported a red-brown grained effect with areas of white marbling. 'Walnut-tree colour' and marbled beds are listed in the wardrobe accounts of Henry VIII, and such a combination of warm brown and white paint effects can be seen on a coloured drawing of a throne of Henry VII from 1496.

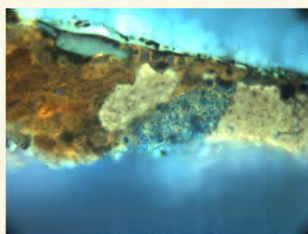


©The British Library Board, Royal 19 A. V. f. 1v
Jehan Chabot and Henry VII



©Helen Hughes, Sample of the primer and wood from the bottom left quarter of the bed

A similar coal primer has been found in contemporary wall paintings, and The National Gallery identified coal primer in early panel paintings. All of the bed's original pigments and binders were in use in the early Tudor period in these combinations, and none were invented after c.1650 when artificial pigments became common.



©Helen Hughes
Sample of lapis lazuli from the headboard

The pigments include lapis lazuli, or 'ultramarine', the most expensive of all medieval paint materials, more costly than gold.

The uniformity of the medieval paint proves that this is an intact original frame, and not a combination of timbers from various sources, which would reveal varied decoration.

The timber's pre-Victorian age is shown by the nineteenth-century varnish plugging woodworm chambers directly beneath the now lost paint surfaces. The Victorian repairs confirm this story: they bear no such early paintwork but are merely varnished.

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WHO MADE IT?

The oak's DNA origin is central European. In the Upper Rhine region can be found simpler late medieval bed frames with pierced headboard tracery and footboards. This may indicate that a frame and panels were cut to order in Germany, and then imported to London to be carved.

This idea is supported by the name of Thomas Stokhous, a joiner with a German name, who in September 1485- just weeks after Henry VII's accession- helped to refurbish the apartments of Elizabeth of York and Margaret Beaufort, the King's mother, at Coldharbour Palace near St Paul's Cathedral.



An Anglo-German royal joinery workshop explains some unusual features of the bed's design. Nuremberg is the likeliest source of the cast iron screws that held the lion finials in place. The panels of the headboard are very similar to illustrations in some early German printed books, while the fishscale pattern in the shields can be found in continental parade shields called pavises.

But the detailed carving seems to have been done by English craftsmen, including members of the royal workshop who carved the choir stalls of St George's Chapel Windsor in 1480-3, supervised by William Barclay, head carver to Elizabeth of York's father King Edward IV.



Windsor, St George's Chapel - The choir stalls of c.1481-3 made for Edward IV. This is the work of the English royal carving workshop prior to the importation of continental influences by Henry VII after his exile. It shows tendrils and flowers comparable to those seen on the bed, and the hands closely resemble those on the bed's figures. The pierced work is stylistically Germanic.

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OAK WALL-POSTS

In 2014, four salvaged oak posts were discovered, with finely-cut details like the bed's posts in form, construction and decoration. Their early date is confirmed by a flame scorch, an 'apotropaic' charm apparently to avert fire, found from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries. A royal pedigree is represented by an 'h', half an 'R' and a fleur-de-lys similar to that found on the bed, in letterforms consistent with the 1480s-90s. The posts revealed the same textured coal-based primer and early pigments as the bed: red and yellow, in this case.

These posts were not furniture but exceptional wall-posts once accompanied by panels to line an irregular, small space such as an oratory or chapel.

Importantly, the cutting and fitting of wall panelling must be done through close measurement and on-site adjustment, which tells us this royal workshop was likely near the royal seat in Westminster.

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HERALDRY AND SYMBOLISM

HERALDRY

Unlike the posts, there are no 'h R' letters on the bed.
So what can it tell us?

The only king and queen to each be represented by single roses are Henry VII (red rose of Lancaster) and Elizabeth of York (white rose of York). Though they continued to be used, single roses would correctly suit the months before the double Tudor rose was created in April 1486. So, the reign of Henry and Elizabeth fits the style of the bed, and the associated wall-posts.



SYMBOLISM



©British Museum, 1895.0122.285
The Old and the New Testament, or allegory of the law and the gospel, c.1528 attributed to Lucas Cranach.

The beautifully carved headboard of the bed is its main focus, divided into three openwork panels. It represents the theme of redemption from the downfall of man, interpreted through the lens of royal marriage.



The central panel shows two figures like Adam and Eve facing each other. Their faces resemble early portraits of Henry and Elizabeth, and the form of their bodies can be closely compared with illuminations in the fifteenth-century royal library.



©British Library Board, Royal MS 15 E VI, 1444-1445
Poems and Romances (the 'Talbot Shrewsbury book').

In Genesis, Adam and Eve brought the fall of man through the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The Old and New Testaments have similar stories called 'types'. The equivalent to Adam and Eve was Christ and Mary, the redeemers who present the heavenly Tree of Life in the Book of Revelation. The idea of an apple signifying temptation was reversed when held by Christ and/or the Virgin Mary: it became a sign of redemption. Fifteenth-century artists favoured this imagery, set within a paradise with red and white roses, the devices of Henry and Elizabeth.



©Wallraf-Richartz-Museum & Fondation Corboud
Madonna of the Rose Bower,
Stefan Lochner, c.1448

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SYMBOLISM

REDEMPTION

The figures are Christ and the Virgin Mary in a moment of a marital pledge, fidelity being an act of holy redemption over evil: in this case, the internal warfare of their families. Hence, the bed's serpent cannot give away its apple of temptation. If the idea of Christ and Mary being married seems unusual, medieval theologians described her as wife and mother, a mystical bride.

This was reflected just after Arthur, Prince of Wales was born in September 1486. Royal musician Gilbert Banaster wrote this motet for Queen Elizabeth, evoking Mary's immaculate conception:

'O Mary and Elizabeth, O fruitful kindred, blessed mothers of all mothers, through whom God especially wrought the new work of bringing forth offspring, to the wonder of nature... these women's wombs were filled... by whose fullness the demons are crushed, people saved, and angels restored... whatever was good in Elizabeth's childbearing is given by grace of Mary's son... and after the wombs were filled, the servant recognized the saviour-king.' (O Maria et Elizabeth)



© Hever Castle Ltd, Arthur Prince of Wales
Anglo-Flemish School, c.1500

Even earlier, Henry VII was seen as a redeemer from evils.

'...he [Henry VII] began to receive the praises of all, as though he had been an angel sent down from heaven, through whom God deigned to visit His people, and deliver it from the evils with which it had hitherto, beyond measure, been afflicted' (Croyland Continuator, April 1486)

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SYMBOLISM

CRUSHING BIBLICAL EVILS

Henry and Elizabeth are shown as Christ and the Virgin, saviours who rescued mankind from evil. How were the themes of crushing demons and deliverance from evil expressed in the bed?



At the feet of the figures are a dragon and lion; in the tree between them descends a strange beaked serpent called a cockatrice. These three creatures are not heraldic, but representations of evil, from 'royal' Psalm 91 which was recited at compline (night-prayers).

The three evil beasts and the royal bedchamber

What the king and queen heard at compline was this passage from Psalm 91 (10-13):

...super aspidem et basiliscum calcabis conculcabis leonem et draconem...

(...Thou shalt go upon a snake, and a cockatrice; and thou shalt defoul a lion, and a dragon...)

The image of Christ trampling combinations of these animals was a thousand years old. But during Henry VII's reign the same theme was used by Charles VIII and Louis XII of France, who showed themselves trampling a lion and dragon, quoting Psalm 91.



©Bibliothèque Nationale de France 702 folio 1.
Louis XII (r. 1498-1515) receives the translation by
Claude Seyssel of a 'Cyropaedia' on virtuous rule,
c.1505-1508.

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SYMBOLISM

MARIGOLDS AND DAISIES



If Henry VII were a Christ-like king, then Elizabeth of York should be shown as Mary, Queen of Paradise. This is indicated by the two flowers with petals set by their abdomens.

They are stripped of all colour, but that on the left seems a daisy (a medieval symbol of Christ), the larger on the right a marigold (a late medieval symbol of the Virgin Mary). It has gone unnoticed by scholars that the king and queen used these flowers to represent themselves.



©British Library Board,
MS Arundel 66 f.53, Detail of
Astrological compilation and
political prophecies, 1490
A gillyflower marries a garland of
daisies to one of marigolds,
the border showing red and
white roses combined.



©British Library Board,
MS Royal 11 E XI f. 2 recto,
Magister Sampson, Benedictus de Opitiis
and others, Motets, 1516

The earliest example is the only surviving literature from their marriage: the epithalamium of Giovanni Gigli written for Elizabeth of York in her bridal chamber. A royal manuscript from 1490 shows a daisy and marigold united by a gillyflower, symbolic of marriage. Thirty years on, Henry VIII recognised his parents by these same floral symbols.

The figures are accompanied by symbols of fertility: the male side features an acorn, and the female side a bunch of grapes for wine representing Christ's blood, the product of Mary's womb. Strawberries are plentiful symbolising paradise – like Mary's womb, a defended, fertile garden.



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SYMBOLISM

SEVEN STARS

Some of the symbolism on the bed is specifically royal, including the seven stars based on Ursa Minor ('Big Dipper') led by Arcturus. The headboard displays four stars; the footboard three.



They represent the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost following an ancient biblical commentary called Moralia in Job. From the mid-thirteenth century, these gifts were understood to be presented to English kings at the moment of coronation.

The stars could be divided into groups of three and four as they appear in the sky: four stars represent the four cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance) which medieval writers associated with the qualities of Christ-like rule; and the remaining three, the holy trinity.



©British Library Board, MS Arundel 66 f. 201 r.
Henry VII is presented with a book containing astrology and prophecy. A bishop points to the stars demonstrating the king's reliance on theology and prophecy.



Early fifteenth century glass,
All Saints North Street, York

The seven stars were used in the London pageant for the next royal wedding, that of Catherine of Aragon and Arthur (who was likely conceived on this bed, and probably named after Arcturus). This is how he was presented:

*'This ys Arthurus, enlumynyng ecch coost
Wyth seven brygth steris, vij gyfftyz of the holy
Goost.'*

Their marriage bed could have been one described in the 1542 wardrobe inventory of Westminster and Whitehall, which also had four 'planets' (e.g. celestial bodies) in the headboard.

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SYMBOLISM

THE TREE OF LIFE AND EDWARD THE CONFESSOR

In the 1480s, Edward the Confessor was sometimes symbolised with his distinctive 'cross fleurie' on parade armour.



©British Library Board, Add MS 48976 f.8ar, The Rous Roll, c. 1483. Parade helmets, one showing the symbol of St Edward the Confessor as a simple Cross Fleurie.



On the bed, this style of cross is seen at the base of the tree. It refers to Christ's crucifixion generating the Tree of Life, and also the obscure parallel legend of the *Arbor Fertilis* in which Saint Edward the Confessor united three parts of a chopped trunk, through which fruits sprouted from the resurrected stump. Strikingly, Edward's coronation was the subject of the mural behind the bed.

All this cleverly combined symbolism uniquely suited the marriage bed of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York. It is free from error to an extent impossible for historians of the nineteenth century, and much has been recently rediscovered, remaining unpublished even today.

But how do we know that a wedding bed was made for Henry and Elizabeth to represent these themes of reconciliation from the evils of war?

Henry VII's chronicler Bernard Andre recalled that in 1485

'...it was decreed by harmonious consent that one house would be made from two families that had once striven in mortal hatred. Then wedding torches, marriage bed, and other suitable decorations were prepared.'

That marriage bed was placed in Westminster Palace.

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WESTMINSTER PALACE

St Edward the Confessor was the model for Christ-like English kingship, and his shrine remains the focus of Westminster Abbey, around which late medieval monarchs were interred. The bed shows the Confessor's shield - a 'cross fleurie' - from which a tree grows. This life-giving symbolism represents the obscure Westminster legend of the *Arbor Fertilis*.



©National Gallery, The Wilton Diptych c.1395-9. Made for Richard II who did much to remodel royal Westminster. It shows the role of St Edward the Confessor supporting the king's direct relationship with Christ and the Virgin. The flag of St George is upheld in heaven.

Westminster was the heart of medieval royalty in life and death. The abbey church and monastery were linked to Westminster Palace, the main residence of the medieval English monarchy until the palace suffered a major fire in 1512. Henry III (1216-72) substantially rebuilt the abbey, and to the palace halls he added a ceremonial bedchamber overlooking the river. It was called the Painted Chamber because of its murals of Old Testament kings in righteous battle; the window jambs showed good overcoming evil.

The state bed was placed against the north wall, behind which was a chapel. The bed was surrounded by four posts carrying drapes. In the right-hand space between the posts and the bed itself was a quatrefoil opening into the chapel through which to view the altar and hear the night prayers.

In 1819 the mural of Edward the Confessor's coronation was revealed on this medieval wall - a blue field beneath an arcade painted in red and yellow with black and white sections like the posts of the bed. It was burned in 1834.

The state bed fits the height, rhythm and shape of this arcade.



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LANCASHIRE

In summer 1495 Henry and Elizabeth went on progress to Lathom and Knowsley in Lancashire. Lathom was the principal seat of Thomas Stanley, Henry VII's stepfather, and by 1513 enjoyed the reputation that 'within may be lodged kynges three'. Thomas' brother, William Stanley, Lord Chamberlain, had been executed for treason in January 1495. Lord Chamberlains usually received items of state furniture, so perhaps the bed was a posthumous gift, for it was copied in c.1500 for Thomas Stanley's own bed: they are the same size, but Stanley's was much simpler - its headboard merely panelled. It too was painted- red and green.



A later inheritor of Lathom, Henry Stanley Fourth Earl of Derby (1531-93) was a loyal supporter of the Protestant king Edward VI (1547-53). The carved band on the headboard (banderole) was inscribed with the 1537-49 bible text he used:

'The Sting of Death is Sinne; The Strength of Sinne is the Lawe' (1 Corinthians 15:56)

This simplified the subject as simply Adam and Eve sinning, as acceptable to Protestants.



©British Library Board, The Genealogies of Holy Scriptures, John Speed, 1611.

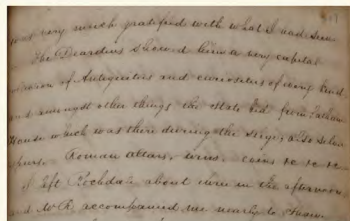
In 1593-4, an inventory of Lathom specified two great beds, worth £20 and £13 respectively. In 1610, John Speed made a map of Lancashire, and surely encountered the bed. He had a second task that year: engraving an Adam and Eve for the King James Bible. He adapted the bed, revising its royal Catholic imagery. The bed's bible text was updated to the later Geneva bible, with which Speed was familiar.

After the Civil War the family possessions were inherited by Henrietta Mary Stanley who married into the Wentworth Family, based twenty miles south of Huddersfield.

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GEORGE SHAW

George Shaw (1810-76) of Uppermill, Saddleworth tells us in his diary that in January 1842 he encountered a rundown bed 'one of the first and finest ones after its reparation... with the addition of heraldic insignia' from a house near Huddersfield. He was sent by his friend James Dearden of Rochdale, who had inherited the Thomas Stanley bed in 1828. Presumably, both beds from Lathom were once kept at this same house.



George Shaw's diary entry, 3rd Oct 1829, showing the Stanley bed of c.1500 owned by Dearden at Rochdale.



St Chad's Rochdale

Shaw was a fraudster who profited from the new market for antique furniture. He had a woodworking shop which made fake Tudor furniture based on the details of the Henry VII bed. But they included Tudor towel rails, chests of drawers and large mirrors: Shaw was no scholar. His much simpler pieces in fresh Victorian oak do not (of course) feature medieval paint, nor Victorian repairs like this one. And he unwittingly copied the lower headboard panels he found, being an eighteenth-century repair.

The omission of some of the carved symbols on his pieces proves he did not understand the bed's subtle original meanings beyond the obvious Adam and Eve. Its relationship to Westminster was long-forgotten: he never referred to his copies as royal beds, nor marriage beds, and his smaller versions do not relate to the Painted Chamber mural. Instead, Shaw's clumsy work failed to convince the Duke of Northumberland.



© Christie's, George Shaw reproduction

Shaw can quickly be dismissed as the maker of this bed. Instead, he merely stripped, repaired and varnished this damaged old bed. And he did not sell it. The royal front crest was stripped, trimmed and nailed over a door in his house, where it has remained for 140 years.



Comparison of the headboard detail of the original bed and George Shaw's reproduction.