

DAVID HAUNTON has been investigating

GROWTES: THE HOME OF A RICH MAN IN 1554

Edward Whitchurch sold the mansion house called 'Growtes', together with the lordship and manor of Morden and all his other lands, houses and rights in Morden, to the Garth family on 7 March 1554 'in the first year of the reign of our Sovereign lady Mary by the grace of god Queen of England, France and Ireland' for the sum of £460 (at least a million pounds today). This article considers some of the inventory attached to the 'Bargain and Sale'¹ (the formal record of the transaction) to explore the taste of a rich man in the mid sixteenth century.

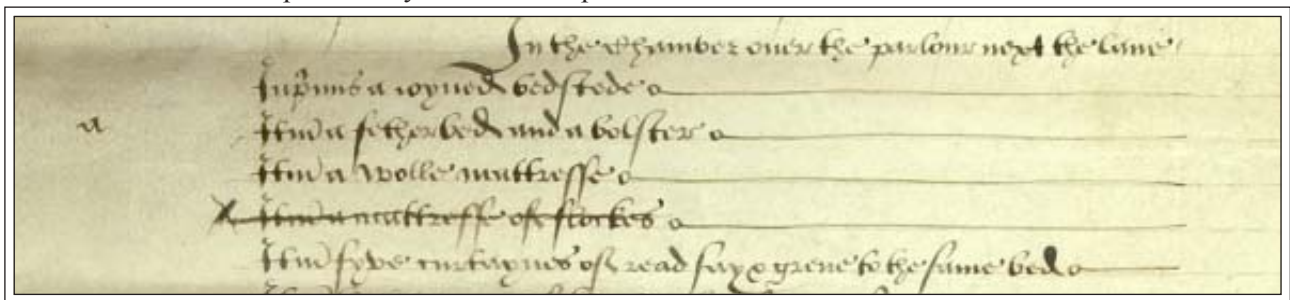
The Man²

First, who was Edward Whitchurch? He was a haberdasher and bookseller who with his partner Richard Grafton became printer to Henry VIII, and his son Edward VI. Among the firm's publications were the Great Bible (the first official translation into English, 1539), primers for school-children (one of which, in 1546, was the first book printed in Welsh), church service books, and the first editions of the 1549 Book of Common Prayer. The business was based in London; early addresses are uncertain, but from 1545 it was at the sign of the Sun in Fleet Street. One reason Whitchurch remained in favour was that he was known as a zealous Protestant, publishing many evangelical works during the reign of Edward VI (1547–1553). When Catholic Mary came to the throne in 1553, and specifically excluded him from the list of forgiven Protestants in her coronation pardon, he speedily left the country for the good of his health, selling Growtes as he did so.

The Bargain and Sale has 23 mentions of Edward, either by himself or 'and his heirs', but at one point refers to 'Edward Whitchurch and Agnes now his wife'.³ This lady does not seem to be documented elsewhere.⁴ I suggest that the marriage was a recent, second, one for Edward, that the document had originally been drawn up referring to Edward and Agnes throughout; that Agnes had even more recently died; that the document was hastily re-written after her death; and that the sole remaining reference to Agnes is a slip of the scrivener's pen. We do not know where Whitchurch went after 1554, but he later married Margaret, the German widow of Archbishop Cranmer, which may indicate that he went to Germany (possibly to Strassburg or Wesel, where there were large enough communities to form English-speaking congregations). Or he may have gone to the Netherlands, with which he had both professional links and religious sympathies. He eventually returned to London, and died in Camberwell in 1562, survived by four adult children, presumably of his first marriage.⁵

The House

With Lionel Ducket, a mercer of London (who became Sir Lionel and Lord Mayor in 1572), Whitchurch was 'granted' (ie. sold) the manor of Morden and other properties by Edward VI,⁶ this purchase being completed on 30 June 1553. As the manor was leased to a tenant farmer, who occupied the old manorial centre, Whitchurch looked elsewhere for a dwelling. Fortunately Growtes, a copyhold property inherited in 1540 by 13-year-old Henry Lord, was on the market. The inventory for the 'new-built mansion house' may have been originally drawn up by Whitchurch himself (one heading is 'Linen in my chamber') but it was later amended with both additions and deletions. The deletions presumably include some personal items he took with him.



Part of the Inventory in good 16th-century hand-writing – Copyright Surrey History Service K85/2/12 reproduced by permission

In the Chamber over the parlour next the lane

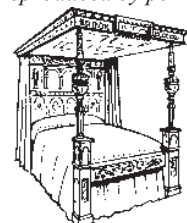
Inprimis a ioyned bedstede

Itm a fether bed and a bolster

Itm a wolle mattresse

Itm a mattresse of flockes

Itm fyve curtaynes of read say & grene to the same bed



Bed with
tester
and
curtains

Growtes itself was a large house of two storeys, situated on the east side of the highway (now Morden Hall Road), within the grounds of what is now Morden Lodge. The name derives from John and Juliane Growte who were admitted to a customary cottage and curtilage on the site in 1443/44. For a timber-framed house, the phrase 'new-built' would remind the new owner that the studding, wattle-and-daub and green timber of its construction could be expected to slowly dry out and shrink or warp,⁷ and thus might soon require minor repairs. On the ground floor,

the reception rooms comprised a hall and parlour and, unusually, a little parlour, while there were three service rooms, including the kitchen and buttery. Upstairs there were no less than seven family and guest chambers, some more comfortable than others. One of them contained a 'little bedstead with a tester' (ie. a bed-canopy), with only three curtains instead of the usual five, evidently for a child. There was also a servants' chamber over the hall (probably the largest room) with an apple loft above that, reached by a ladder.

The Contents

At this period, wall hangings were a sign of social status, imitating the highly expensive tapestries of the very rich. Chairs were generally rare, just beginning to replace forms and settles, and are another sign of fashion and aspiration to upward mobility. Whitchurch had eight, including four cloth-covered ones, a walnut chair with a wooden back, two old joined (ie. carpentry) chairs, and a 'Spanish chair covered with leather', of which the leather was probably painted or gilded.⁸ 'Spanish chairs' were being made in Flemish towns by this date,⁹ which would perhaps have been a more likely source than Catholic Spain.

Visually, there was any amount of colour in the house – the 'little parlour' was also the 'green parlour', presumably painted, while elsewhere the colours of wall hangings, curtains and chairs were noted. One chamber had bed-curtains of red and green 'say', the hangings and one set of window curtains in green, the other set being merely 'old silk'. There was also a red chair with 'pattern of brigus' striped white and red, and two cupboard cloths of 'turkey dorny'. A second chamber had identically coloured hangings and curtains, further brightened with two new coverlets of green and yellow 'dorny', and a chair covered with 'pattern of briges' in red and green. A third chamber had 'red say and green' for all hangings and curtains, but a fourth chamber had only a tester of red and green. The child's bedroom had bed-curtains of 'black buckram and yellow' and hangings of red and yellow buckram, and was also used to store a red 'wagon cloth' and six 'cushions of tapestry for the wagon'. Even the servants' chamber had a tester of 'red and green say' and a chair with red cloth and green lace, and was hung with 'painted cloths with red and green water-flowers'. Downstairs, the main parlour had hangings of 'red and green say', and a chair covered with blue cloth, while the hall was richly decorated with 'hangings of new painted cloths with roses and honeysuckles'. (One wonders if the servants' chamber had inherited old hangings from the hall, since the two rooms were apparently the same size.) The frequent use of the formula 'red say and green' would seem to imply wide strips of red or of green, rather than cloths patterned in red and green.

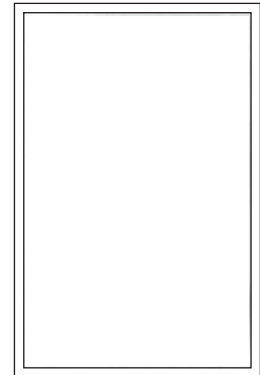
Where did these colours come from?¹⁰ Mostly the dyes were made from common English plants. In general, reds (including 'turkey') were obtained from roots of madder or bedstraw, or from kermes insects imported from southern Europe. Blues came from woad leaves or some types of elderberry,¹¹ yellows from the flowers of weld (also called dyers rocket) or of dyers greenweed, and black from acacia-wood or some fungi. Green was obtained by mixing yellow and blue. The colours so derived are subdued in hue when compared to present-day synthetic dyes. English plants were usually cultivated in quantity specifically for the long-established dyers market. (The Dyers Guild of London is first mentioned in 1188, while the Dyers Company received its first charter in 1471 and is thirteenth in seniority of the 97 City Livery Companies.)¹²

Whitchurch had three carpets, two in the parlour and one in his chamber, two being of 'dorny'. At this date, carpets were not always laid on the floor, but might be draped over a table, as shown in his parlour, where the first item was 'a table with a frame & a carpet of green cloth'.

The various fabrics mentioned were expensive; in the sixteenth century¹³ 'say' was a fine lightweight cloth made from carded or combed wool, often augmented with silk, while 'dorny' was a silk, worsted or part-woollen fabric, and 'buckram' a costly and delicate fabric of cotton or linen. 'Pattern of briges' is uncertain, but probably denoted a satin. All these were probably of English manufacture, even though 'say' originated in the Netherlands in competition with English cloth,¹⁴ and 'pattern of briges/brigus' is named for the city of Bruges, and 'dorny' for Doornik (Tournai), both now in Belgium. However, there were also andirons 'of Flanders work' by the parlour fireplace and a 'Flanders pot' in the kitchen, and we know Whitchurch gave his first printing contract (the 'Matthew Bible', 1537) to a printer in Antwerp, so it seems probable that he had maintained some Netherlands connections. This seems the more likely since Antwerp had become a major centre of European printing by the 1540s.

An educated man, Whitchurch took away with him several books that were in all probability printed by his firm, including a little Bible, a service book, a psalter and a book of prayers, as well as 'divers' others. He also took the 'pair of virginals', which despite the name was a single musical instrument (an early harpsichord), and perhaps also the tester made from a old cope, an uncomfortably sacrilegious item removed from the chamber over the kitchen.

We have some evidence of his taste, quite literally, in the kitchen, where one of several mortars was reserved for crushing garlic (so for use rather than ostentation), and one glass bottle was specifically for containing salad oil.



Spanish chair
(Dictionary of Art
Vol.29 p.314)

The Pictures

There were a number of pictures in the house. At this period, various words could describe a picture, including picture, storie, table or tablet, and not all pictures were framed. Any of the above words could describe a print such as a woodcut, or an oil-painting, whether on canvas, cloth or wooden panel.¹⁵ Within the Growtwe inventory, we can be sure of ‘two pictures in frames’ in the third chamber, a ‘painted storie’ in the hall, and two ‘painted stories’ in the parlour, and slightly less confident of ‘two painted tables’ in the chamber over the little parlour, and ‘a pair of tables’ in the parlour. The ‘square table with a frame’, also in the parlour, is probably a wooden table, but might be a picture. Thus we have a total of at least five, probably nine and possibly ten pictures, which is a remarkable number for a sixteenth-century English house. A study of the inventories attached to over 600 wills of wealthy English people dating between 1417 and 1588 calculated that only 63 contained any work of art at all. Of these, two collections of 16 and 17 pictures in 1533 are adjudged ‘very large’, the possessions of very wealthy men.¹⁶ So we may draw our own conclusions as to the wealth and status of Edward Whitchurch.

Not the Fairy and the Gnome – A Cautionary Tale

The only picture where the subject is known was kept in the hall, and proved most intriguing. The description was first read as a ‘painted storie of the faere and ye Nome’, which was assumed to be ‘The Fairy and the Gnome’. This was exciting since ‘Gnome’ does not officially enter English until more than a century later, in a 1658 translation of the *Works* of Paracelsus. The Folklore Society did not know of such a tale, and suggested that ‘Nome’ might be ‘Naine’ (‘dwarf’ in French), to which I replied enclosing a copy of part of the manuscript. I then discovered a little more about Paracelsus, physician, mystic and very opinionated; one of his teachings was that the four classical elements were each inhabited by a characteristic spirit – gnome (earth), sylph (air), salamander (fire) and undine (water). Did Whitchurch have a picture of a sylph and a gnome? And did his hangings painted with ‘water flowers’ = water lilies = nenuphar, another Paracelsus symbol?

Fortunately, Dr Mark Page¹⁷ had almost simultaneously with my query amended ‘Nome’ to ‘None’. The Folklore Society, writing again, concurred and suggested very politely that ‘faere’ was wrong as well, supplying the solution to our puzzle.¹⁸ The text we actually have is ‘the frere and ye None’, ie. ‘the Friar and the Nun’, the title of a poem describing a simple tale of sexual seduction. This was composed as an anti-clerical and anti-Catholic satire,¹⁹ versions of which were very popular in the early 1500s. Explicit prints of the subject were available, such as those engraved by Aldegrever in the 1530s, and one would seem a suitable possession for a hot Protestant such as Whitchurch to smile over. If it were a print, the ‘storie’ would have been hand-coloured with water-based inks similar to modern poster paints. It may not have been on public display in his hall, but pasted up out of immediate sight inside the ‘painted and carved cupboard’ in the room (a not uncommon Catholic practice with more conventional religious images – which might improve the jest).



The Friar and the Nun (*reproved by a representative of the secular German people*).
Engraving by Heinrich Aldegrever, 1530

So, Check Your Sources Before You Leap !

Acknowledgement

I owe a very considerable debt of gratitude to Dr Caroline Oates, Librarian of the Folklore Society, and her colleagues at the Warburg Institute, Bloomsbury Square, for sharing their expertise and kindly ushering me onto the right gnome/nun lines.

- 1 Surrey History Centre K/85/2/12 *Bargain and Sale by Edward Whitchurch... to Richard Garth and Elisabeth his wife...* transcribed by Peter Hopkins and corrected by Dr Mark Page for Merton Historical Society (February 2009). All unattributed quotes are from this document; I have modernised their spelling. My thanks to Peter for permission to use the results of his labours. Please note he is not responsible for my mistakes.
- 2 Most of this section is from Alec Ryrie *Edward Whitchurch in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* 2004-2005 OUP, and an e-mail from Dr Ryrie to author 4 September 2009.
- 3 Compare the number of references to the Garths: 17 mentions of ‘Richard and Elizabeth ... or heirs ... of Richard’, and only three of Richard alone.
- 4 *ODNB loc.cit.* ‘... first marriage or marriages are unrecorded ...’
- 5 Edward, Helen, Elizabeth and a third daughter whose name is unknown.
- 6 Cal. Pat. Rolls 7 Edward VI pt xi m 13 [pp.233-4] (Reference courtesy of Peter Hopkins.)
- 7 Oliver Rackham *Ancient Woodland* 2003 Castlepoint Press pp.145, 457-9
- 8 María Paz Aguiló *Spain VI, 2; Furniture 1517-1700 (iii) Chairs* in Jane Turner (ed) *Dictionary of Art* 1996 Macmillan Vol.29 p.314
- 9 Stéphane Vandenberghe *Belgium VI, 1; Furniture before 1600* in Jane Turner (ed) *Dictionary of Art* 1996 Macmillan Vol.3 p.582
- 10 Most of this section is from Su Grierson *Dyeing and Dyestuffs* 1989 Shire Publications (kindly loaned by Judith Goodman.)
- 11 Indigo was not imported in any quantity until the 17th century.
- 12 *City Livery Companies* in Weinreb and Hibbert (eds) *The London Encyclopaedia* 1983 Macmillan
- 13 Fabric definitions from dated citations in *Oxford English Dictionary* (second edition) 1989 OUP
- 14 Jan de Vries & Ad van der Woude *The First Modern Economy* 1997 Cambridge UP p.283
- 15 Susan Foister ‘Paintings in sixteenth-century English Inventories’ in *The Burlington Magazine* May 1981 pp.274-275
- 16 Foister *op.cit.* pp.279-280
- 17 Dr Page is Research Fellow of the Whittlewell Project of the Centre for English Local History, University of Leicester. His research interests lie in economic and social history, especially of medieval England, and in settlement and landscape history.
- 18 Letter, Dr Caroline Oates to author 18 June 2009
- 19 P J Croft ‘The ‘Friar of Order Gray’ and the Nun’ in *Review of English Studies* New Series Vol.XXXII, No.125 (1981) (Copy kindly supplied by Dr Oates.)