

The stuccoes of Nonsuch*

THE building of Nonsuch began on 22nd April 1538, the thirtieth anniversary of Henry VIII's accession. The name first appears in the building accounts two months later, when the foundations were still going in. The structure was perhaps substantially complete by January 1541, but the work of decoration continued. By November 1545 the cost amounted to £24,536, half as much again as had been spent at Hampton Court during the same period. When Henry died on 28th January 1547, the palace was still unfinished, but what little remained to be done was completed by Henry Fitzalan, twelfth Earl of Arundel, after 1556. Nonsuch was demolished in 1682–83, and excavated in 1959.¹

The intention to create a nonpareil – ‘This, which no equal has in art or fame,’ in Horace Walpole's translation of Leland's verse – was there from the start. It was implicit in the decision to use timber to build the inner court, the framing of which would hold the long sequences of stucco panels which were to be the fame of Nonsuch and the explanation of Henry's purpose in its creation. But the demolition of 1682–83 removed Nonsuch from the stage of English art. The building had obviously played some key rôle in the development of Tudor architecture and probably in the emergence of the renaissance style in England, but two paintings and the engravings of the south front by Hoefnagel and Speed provided no basis for any detailed judgments on form or style, let alone on the content of the decorations.²

The excavation of 1959 was designed to establish the ground plan and to recover whatever remained of the decorations that the engravings showed as covering the outside walls of the inner court. Both objectives were achieved. There then followed an intensive search for further documentary evidence, particularly visitors' descriptions of the palace, and more recently a renewed study of

the available pictorial evidence, and detailed examination and drawing of the slate and stucco fragments in preparation for their publication. This note sets out some of the main conclusions which have been reached.

The palace was arranged around two principal courts. The northern or outer court, entered by a turreted gatehouse, was built in brick and stone in the normal Tudor manner. On the south side a second gatehouse led to the southern or inner court, ‘*quod iure suo et omnium iudicio Nonesuch appellatur*’.³ The ground floor of this court was built of stone, but the upper levels (corresponding to the principal apartments on the first floor, the king's side to the west, the queen's to the east, with a garret floor above) were timber-framed. The timbers themselves were invisible, encrusted with plaques of carved and gilded slate, but they held three registers of *stucco duro* panels, moulded in high relief.

This decoration on the inward-looking walls of the inner court can be reconstructed in considerable detail from descriptions and travellers' accounts; the subjects can in this way be identified and the programme established (see below). But except for a glimpse over the roof of the south front in Speed's view, no drawings of the interior of the inner court seem to have survived. By contrast, the general appearance of the south or garden front is well known from Speed and Hoefnagel, but was never described in detail. The pictorial evidence shows not only that the garden front was timber-framed to ground level, but also that the decorations continued along the east and west walls as far as the junction with the outer court.

The decorative scheme was thus some 900 feet (274 m) in length, with a *minimum* average height of 24 feet (7.5 m). It therefore covered a surface of some 21,600 square feet (2055 m²). Sheer size was not least among the attributes of Nonsuch. The general decorative concept, of stucco panels framed by borders of black slate, can be established from descriptions and from the fragments recovered. To see how these elements were articulated into a coherent whole, we have to turn to other evidence. Hoefnagel's famous engraving, first published in 1598, was derived from a drawing now in the British Museum. This in turn is a simplified version of a water-colour painted in 1568 which not only demonstrates Hoefnagel's ability to work in miniature, but also preserves with an extraordinary immediacy a detailed impression of how Nonsuch really looked (Figs.21 and 22).⁴

* The excavation of Nonsuch in 1959–60 was carried out by the Nonsuch Palace Excavation Committee under the chairmanship of Sir John Summerson and with the support of the (then) Ministry of Works, the British Academy, the Society of Antiquaries, the Marc Fitch Fund, and many other bodies and individuals. Research on the decorations of Nonsuch was recommenced in 1974 with the assistance of Josephine Turquet and supported by a crucial grant from Mr F. D. L. Astor. Since then the work of preparing the results for publication has been generously supported by the Department of the Environment and now by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission. Drawings of a small sample of the stucco and of the slate carvings are published here for the first time with the permission of the Controller of HMSO, © Crown copyright 1984.

¹ MARTIN BIDDLE: ‘Nonsuch 1959–60: an interim report’, *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, 58 [1961], pp.1–20; *idem*: ‘Nonsuch Palace’, *The Journal of the London Society*, 363 [June 1963], pp.14–30; *idem*: ‘Nicholas Bellin of Modena, an Italian artificer at the courts of Francis I and Henry VIII’, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 3rd ser., 29 [1966], pp.106–21. See also J. DENT: *The Quest for Nonsuch*, 2nd ed., London [1970]; paperback reprint from the 2nd ed., Sutton [1981]. The palace was considered in the context of the King's Works by MARTIN BIDDLE and JOHN SUMMERSON in H. M. COLVIN (ed.): *The History of the King's Works*, iv [1982], pp.179–205. The content and iconography of the decorations of the inner court have been studied by JOSEPHINE TURQUET in ‘The inner court of Nonsuch Palace’ unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1983. The excavations of 1959–60 and subsequent research will be published in MARTIN BIDDLE: *The Palace of Nonsuch* (Research Report of the Society of Antiquaries of London, in preparation).

² See for example A. W. CLAPHAM: ‘The royal palace of Nonsuch, Surrey’, in A. W. CLAPHAM and W. H. GODFREY: *Some famous buildings and their story*, London [n.d., c. 1913], pp.3–12.

³ ANTHONY WATSON: *Magnificae et plane regiae domus, quae vulgo vocatur Nonesuch, brevis et vera descriptio*, Trinity College, Cambridge, MS.R.7.22, fol.2^r.

⁴ I am most indebted to the owner of the Hoefnagel water-colour, and to his wife, who with great kindness over many years have given me every facility to study and photograph their painting. The whole picture is reproduced in colour, and the inter-relationship of the three versions is further discussed, in *The Renaissance at Sutton Place*, exh. cat., Sutton Place [1983], pp.92–96. See also G. KAUFFMANN: *Die Kunst des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Propyläen Kunstgeschichte 8, Berlin [1970], pp.379–380, Pl.390. John Rowlands, Keeper of Prints and Drawings, The British Museum, made possible a memorable confrontation of the two Hoefnagel versions at the Museum in 1983, and I am most grateful for his willing co-operation and kindness. Figs.21 and 22 are from colour photographs by Michael Fear.

Hoefnagel's work is so fine that it is even possible to identify some of the stuccoes: terms can be seen flanking the window on the central bay, and elsewhere a centaur and a three-headed hydra are clearly depicted. The stucco figures are drawn with blue-black strokes, highlighted with white to give the effect of relief. The borders between the panels are drawn in sepia with double lines, painted white between, and appearing yellowish (perhaps from a buff wash at an early stage in the work) to either side. The spaces between the panels barely exceed 1 mm: Hoefnagel's technique for indicating in these spaces the presence of the gilded slate borders is a miracle of compression.

His depiction of the major articulating elements on the south front must therefore be taken seriously. The enlarged detail of the south-west tower illustrated here (Fig.21) shows how the angles of the octagon were treated in a detailed and consistent manner. This treatment is applied to all the major verticals dividing the façade at regular intervals right across the south front and to the angles of the central bay and towers. In the water-colour the ground floor is concealed behind the privy garden wall, fourteen feet high, but when the façade emerges above the wall, the angles on the tower are picked out first in red, horizontally divided with black strokes, then in grey divided horizontally and vertically to represent masonry, and then in alternating sections similarly treated in red and grey. The tops of the red sections are elaborated, as if to indicate capitals. The grey sections are not only rather wider, but are related to the horizontals in such a way as to suggest that they are bases to the red sections. This impression is heightened where the whole arrangement is seen in profile at the left-hand edge of the tower.

There seems little doubt that Hoefnagel is showing the division of the elevation into a series of superimposed classical orders: columns on substantial pedestals with their stylobates and entablatures articulating the panels of the south front into a single whole. Timber pedestals and columns on the towers were several times repaired and repainted in the early seventeenth century. Hoefnagel, it seems, was recording with accuracy these same features fifty years before, when the pedestals were painted to look like masonry and the columns to look like marble or granite – for this seems the only conclusion to be drawn from their picking out in red. In this articulation of the whole façade in a system of superimposed orders, albeit only decorative, Nonsuch was a truly innovative building in English architecture, preceding by several years the construction of Old Somerset House in the Strand.

When Nonsuch was demolished in 1682–83, the stucco panels were broken up. From the average size of the pieces recovered in 1959, some 100,000 fragments must have been produced. Most were taken away, but more than fifteen hundred decorated fragments remained, as well as a great quantity of plain pieces. By a remarkable chance the reconstruction of one whole panel has been possible (Figs.26 and 27).⁵ The fragments of this panel were found

together at the foot of the south face of the south-west tower. A figure seated on a shield can be seen on Hoefnagel's watercolour precisely above the spot where these fragments lay. If not coincidence – and there seems no reason to suppose it is – this discovery underlines the validity of Hoefnagel's record of the palace. The reconstructed stucco also provides the measurements of what was clearly a standard panel: 136.8 by 89 cm. Using the figure of 2055 square metres already established for the surface area of the decorations, and leaving more than half for borders, articulating elements, doors, and windows, the reconstructed panel suggests that the original scheme may have involved as many as seven or eight hundred panels.

The stucco fragments (for example, Figs.24, 28–31) show that the Nonsuch decorations were in the mannerist fashion of Fontainebleau, and more in the style of Rosso than Primaticcio. What is more, the work seems to be keeping abreast of developments both stylistic and iconographic that were taking place at Fontainebleau in the 1540s.⁶ This seems also to be true of the slate carving (Figs.23 and 25), the work of Nicholas Bellin of Modena, not least in the arabesques with which some of the panels were engraved (Fig.23).⁷ This should not perhaps be surprising, for the design for the decoration of an English royal interior in the Fontainebleau manner now in the Louvre must be dated between 1543 and January 1547, and so too should the related drawing acquired by the Louvre in 1969.⁸

The Nonsuch stuccoes were actually carried out by an English artificer, (William?) Kendall, and subsequently by an otherwise unknown foreigner, Giles Geringe. The only artificer at Henry's court with technical knowledge of *stucco duro*, who had actually worked at Fontainebleau, was however Nicholas Bellin of Modena. If, as I have proposed elsewhere, he drew the cartoons for the Nonsuch stuccoes, he seems to have been keeping in touch with Fontainebleau, presumably receiving descriptions and sketches of the latest developments from his former colleagues, and especially from those associated with Rosso (although Nicholas himself had begun work at Fontainebleau in 1532 under the supervision of Primaticcio).

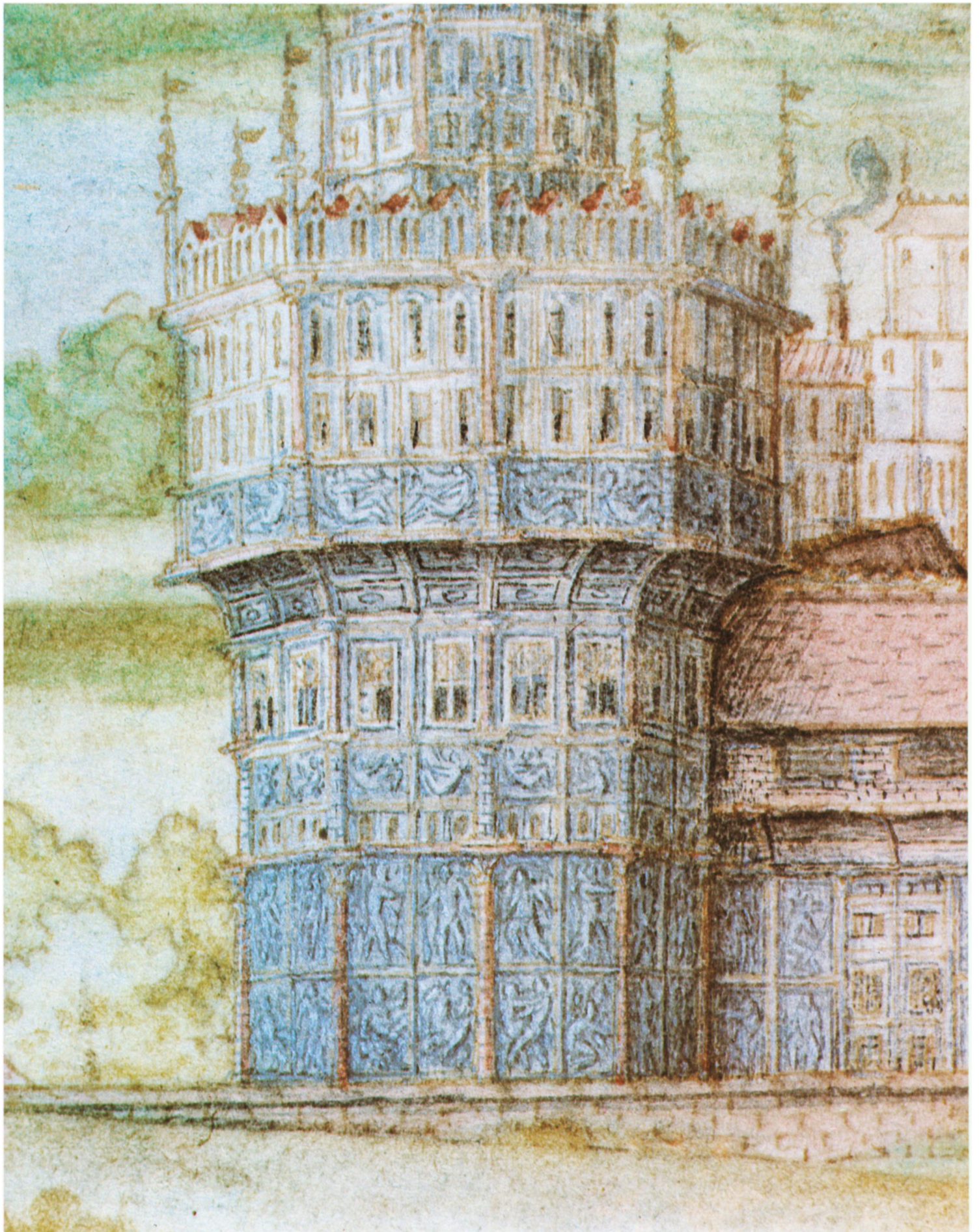
The programme for the decorations will surely have been devised by another mind. All we know of the south front is that it probably included representations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and Hoefnagel's water-colour seems to bear this out. The inward-facing walls of the inner court carried, however, what was probably in terms of programme the key to the whole scheme. The uppermost of the three registers presented the figures of the Roman emperors from Julius Caesar to Aemilianus. The middle register displayed on the king's side the gods of the classical

⁶ These points emerged at a seminar on the problems of Nonsuch given at the Collège de France in February 1984 under the aegis of André Chastel. I am particularly indebted to him and to Sylvie Béguin, Musée du Louvre, for their enlightening and perceptive comments.

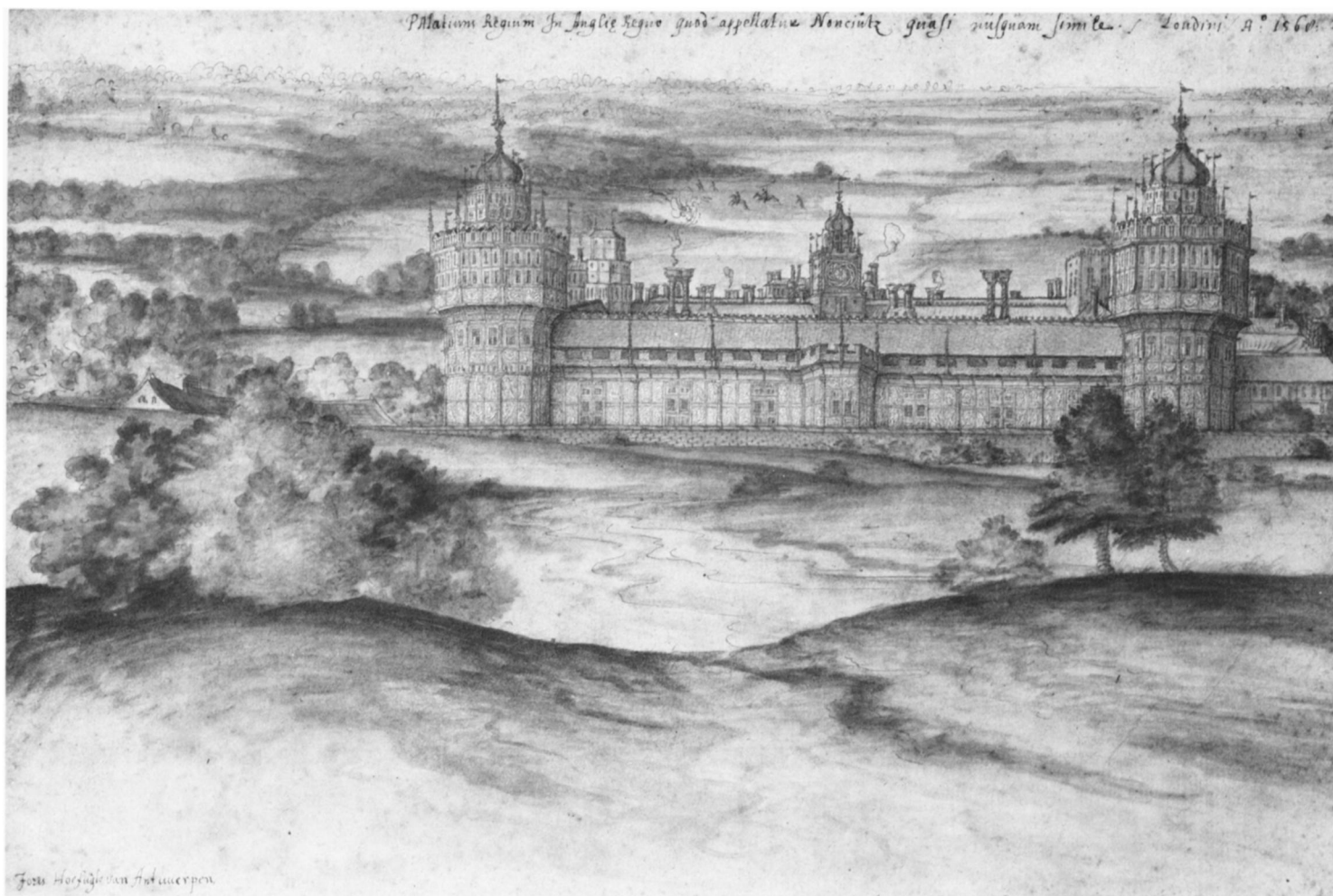
⁷ See M. BIDDLE: 'Nicholas Bellin of Modena...' cited at note 1 above. The Nonsuch slate has been drawn for publication by Nicholas Griffiths, now of the Department of Urban Archaeology, Museum of London, to whom is due the successful reconstruction of one complete panel with a wealth of arabesque decoration on the recessed front of a tapering pedestal, published here for the first time (Fig.23).

⁸ SYLVIE BÉGUIN: 'A propos d'un dessin de Nicolas da Modena récemment acquis par le Louvre', *La revue du Louvre*, 20 [1970], pp.9-14, with references to the previous literature.

⁵ This was achieved by David Honour, of the Ancient Monuments Archaeological Drawing Office, to whom is also due the reconstruction of the panel published here for the first time (Fig.27).



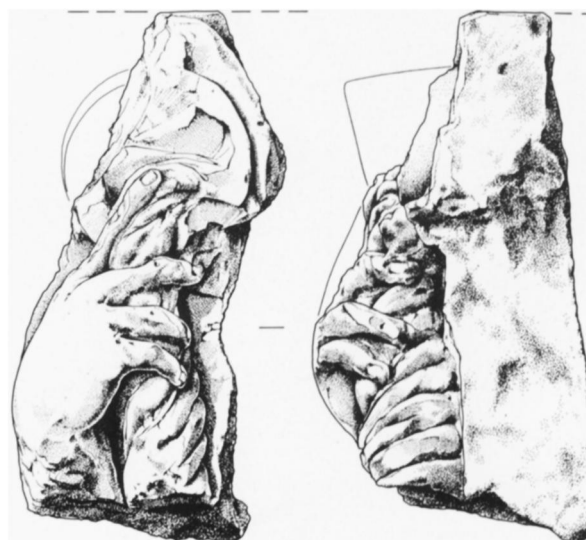
21. Detail, showing the south-west tower, from *Nonsuch Palace* (south façade), by Joris Hoefnagel. 1568. Water-colour. (Private collection).



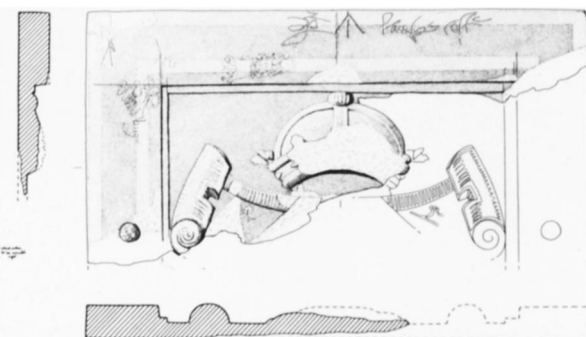
22. *Nonsuch Palace* (south façade), by Joris Hoefnagel. 1568. Water-colour, 21.6 by 32.5 cm. (Private collection).



23. Slate panel (74.7 by 50.7 cm) from *Nonsuch Palace*, showing a pedestal with recessed fields engraved with arabesques, drawn by Nicholas Griffiths.



24. Stucco hand (height 26.6 cm) from *Nonsuch Palace*, grasping drapery hanging from a ring, drawn by David Honour. See Fig. 35.



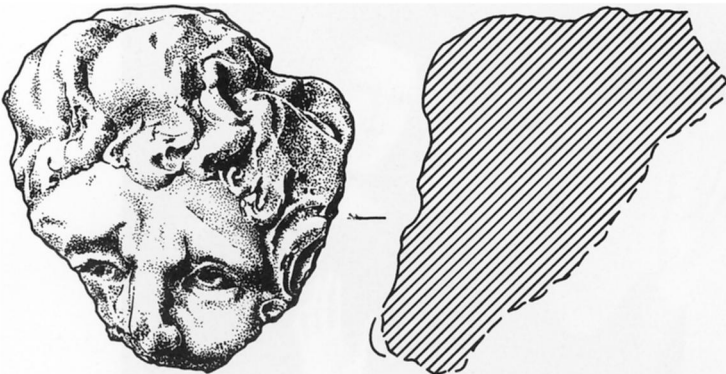
25. Slate panel (width 34.8 cm) from *Nonsuch Palace*, showing the crown imperial above a scroll (the areas of lighter stippling indicate gilding), drawn by Nicholas Griffiths.



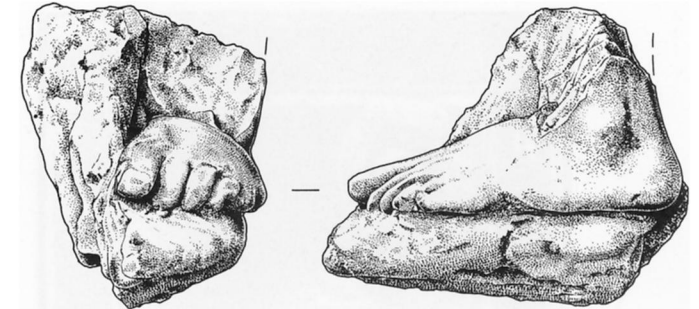
26. Stucco panel (136.8 by 89 cm) from Nonsuch Palace of a Roman soldier seated by his shield (showing the fragments as pieced together).



27. Reconstruction of the stucco panel shown in Fig.26.



28.



29.

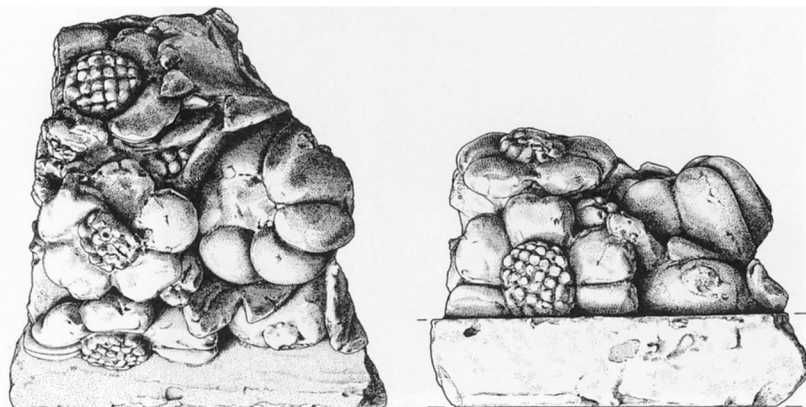
28. Stucco head (height 10.2 cm) from Nonsuch Palace. See Fig.32.

29. Stucco foot (length 16 cm) from Nonsuch Palace.

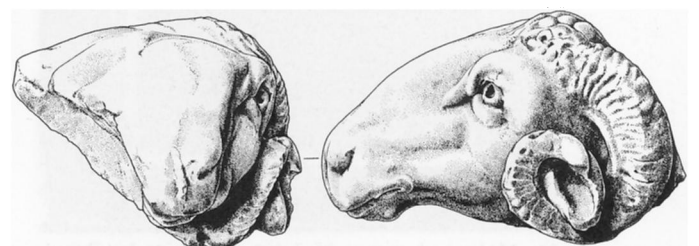
30. Stucco swag of fruit and flowers (width 27 cm) from Nonsuch Palace. See Fig.37.

31. Stucco head of a ram (length 26.6 cm) from Nonsuch Palace. One of a facing(?) pair; for the other see Fig.36.

All drawings on this page are by David Honour.



30.



31.



32.



33.



34.



35.



36.

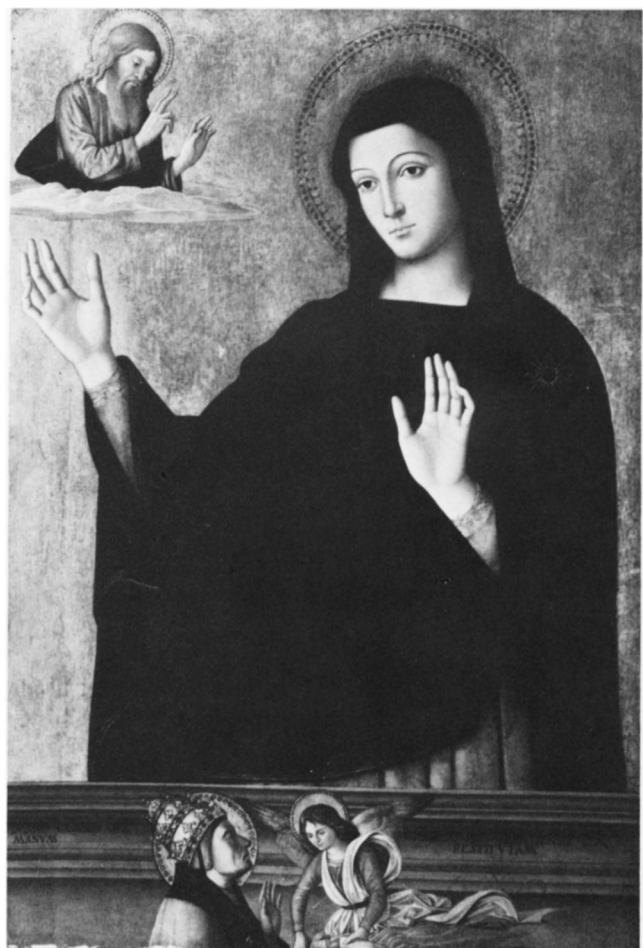


37.

32-37. Stucco fragments from Nonsuch Palace.



38. *Madonna Avvocata with half-length Christ*, by Roman master of mid-twelfth century. Tempera on panel, 107 by 57 cm. (Cini Collection, Venice).



39. *Madonna and Pope Leo*, by Antoniazio Romano. Tempera on panel, 111 by 77 cm. (National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin).

world and on the queen's side the goddesses. The lower register showed on the king's side the life of Hercules from the cradle to his death on Mount Oeta, and on the queen's side the liberal arts and the virtues. The figures were identified with mottoes, imperative and admonitory, written in letters of gilded lead.

From the centre of the south side of the inner court the figure of King Henry VIII with Prince Edward by his side surveyed these scenes, which were at once didactic and tutelary. From them Prince Edward might learn, as in a mirror, the duties of a most Christian prince. By them, as by virtue of the beneficent power of the images themselves, the dynasty and its prince might be safeguarded. And finally, the programme was in a sense an apotheosis, since Henry and Edward were represented among the gods.

Herein lies the purpose and the explanation of Nonsuch. Edward was born on 12th October 1537. By the turn of the year a site had been chosen; in six months, on the thirtieth anniversary of his father's accession, a start was made; by summer the new house was 'Nonsuch'. Henry's intent to build a house without equal is apparent from the start. Nonsuch was a celebration of the birth of his long awaited heir, a vaunting of the Tudors, and a talisman for the dynasty.

Such a programme seems most unlikely to have been devised by Nicholas Bellin. The most likely candidate in my view is the king himself, aided by a group of savants who proposed solutions to the themes Henry wished to see expressed, or who refined and added to the proposals he had made. By intellect and education, and not least by the very intensity of his long quest for an heir, Henry was well able to devise for himself the matter of Nonsuch.⁹

⁹ The final paragraphs are adapted from my contribution to the catalogue, *The Renaissance at Sutton Place* [1983], pp.92-93.

Shorter Notices

Antoniazio Romano, the 'Golden Legend' and A Madonna of Santa Maria Maggiore

BY EUNICE D. HOWE

AMONG the miracles and good works associated with St Leo I the Great (d.461), Jacobus de Voragine relates in the *Golden Legend* a story of carnal temptation and remorse. While Pope Leo was celebrating mass in the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, a woman kissed his hand and aroused his desire. Stricken with shame, Leo I cut off his hand, only to have it restored by the Virgin, who appeared to him during his prayers.¹ A fourteenth-

¹ 'Leo papa, ut in miraculis beatae virginis legitur, dum in ecclesia sanctae Mariae [virginis in die resurrectionis missam] majoris missam celebraret, et dum fideles per ordinem communicaret et quaedam matrona manum ejus osculata fuisset, ex hoc in eum vehemens carnis tentatio insurrexit, at vir Dei in semet ipsum saevissimus ultor insurgit et eadem die manum se scandalizantem [omit: occulte] penitus amputavit et a se reject. Interea murmur oriebatur in populo, cur summus pontifex divina more solito non celebraret. Tunc Leo ad beatam virginem se convertit et ejus providentiae totaliter se commisit. Tunc illa continuo sibi adstitit et manum illi suis sanctissimis manibus restituit.' JACOBUS DE VORAGINE: *Legenda Aurea*, ed. TH. GRAESSE, 2nd ed., Leipzig [1850], Ch.83, p.367.

century illuminator of the *Golden Legend* represented this curious episode as the pope first offering mass and then amputating his hand.² By the late fifteenth century, however, Antoniazio Romano, in a painting now in Dublin, elected to show an angel ministering to Leo I and, above, the Madonna invoking God the Father (Fig.39). The inscription on the parapet behind which the Virgin is depicted in the Dublin painting reads: IMAGO CORAM QUA ORANDO LEO PAPA SENSIT SIBI MANUM RESTITUTAM.³ Not found in any known text, it recalls the miraculous restoration of the hand, but emphasises the image or apparition of the Virgin. The inscription is true to the pictorial imagery, for the artist too has focussed on the likeness of the Virgin rather than on the illustration of an episodic narrative. This iconography, although still faithful to the *Golden Legend*, nevertheless reveals conventions peculiar to the early renaissance in Rome and demonstrates unexpected sources.

The *Madonna and Pope Leo* is assigned to the late career of Antoniazio Romano, c.1490-1500, on stylistic grounds.⁴ Because of the imposing Virgin, isolated against a gold background, the composition has long provoked comparison with an icon, although no specific source has been convincingly proposed.⁵ The 'mediaevalising' character of the painting supports the attribution to Antoniazio Romano, who was noted for depictions of miracle-working Madonnas. Often he copied famous images like the *Madonna of St Luke*, or included a patron's portrait in a Madonna panel. In addition, the artist is recorded as restoring or, more accurately, repainting older icons of the Madonna.⁶

Antoniazio thus drew on conventions which would be very familiar to him to evoke the miracle of St Leo's hand. The bust of the pope appears in profile at the base of the painting, as would a donor in attendance at a holy event.⁷ The parapet

² JACOBUS DE VORAGINE: *Legenda Aurea*, fol.69 verso, San Marino, California, Huntington Library, H.M.3027.

³ In addition to the *Golden Legend*, other collections of the lives of the saints, popular in the late fifteenth century, narrated the miracle of Pope Leo's hand. In his *Sanctuarium* of c.1478, Bonino Mombrioso simply reproduced the text of the *Golden Legend* for his life of St. Leo. See GERHARD EIS: *Die Quellen für das Sanctuarium des Mailänder Humanisten Boninus Mombritius*, Berlin [1933]. A second hagiographical source, the *Catalogus Sanctorum* of Petrus de Natalibus, composed in 1370-1400 related the incident in similar terms but different words. See PETRUS DE NATALIBUS: *Catalogus Sanctorum e Gestorum Eorum*, Vicenza [1493], Book IV, p.140.

⁴ The painting belonged to E. P. Warren, Lewes, and then passed to the Charles Butler Collection, London. The National Gallery of Ireland acquired it in 1920. It is in tempera on panel and measures 111 by 77 cm. The face and hands exhibit retouching. *Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland; Catalogue of Pictures of the Italian Schools*, Dublin [1956], p.61. See also: c. J. FFOLKES, 'Le esposizioni d'arte italiana a Londra', *Archivio storico dell'arte*, Vol.VII [1894], pp.155-56; c. HEDBERG: 'Antoniazio and His School', unpub. diss., New York University, 1980, I, pp.43, 162. The attribution to Antoniazio Romano finds general acceptance, but disagreement continues about the date. It is dated to c.1490 by HEDBERG, *op. cit.*, p.43 and to c.1499-1500 by G. NOEHLES: *Antoniazio Romano; Studien zur Quattrocento-Malerei in Rom*, Diss. Munich, 1973, Munich [1974], pp.228-29. An earlier date of c.1475 is proposed by F. NEGRI-ARNOLDI: 'Madonne giovanili di Antoniazio Romano', *Commentari XV* [1964], p.210, n.22.

⁵ It was first likened to a mosaic by FFOLKES, *loc. cit.*, who identified the pope as Leo IX, a misconception which recurs often. The 'grandiosità neocavallinesca' was noted by R. LONGHI, in 'Primizie di Lorenzo da Viterbo', *Vita artistica*, I [1926], p.112. Cesare Gnudi suggested a specific model: '... riproduce allusivamente la famosa "Madonna dell'Aracoeli" a Roma, certo un quadro votivo o commemorativo ...' See *Mostra del Melozzo da Forlì*, ed. c. GNUDI, Forlì [1938], pp.44-45.

⁶ For Antoniazio as a painter of Madonnas, see NEGRI-ARNOLDI, *op. cit.*, pp.202-12 and HEDBERG, *op. cit.*, p.13, n.51. Discussion of his use of mediaeval models is provided by NOEHLES, *op. cit.*, pp.20-24.

⁷ Antoniazio frequently included portraits of patrons in his altar-pieces and panel paintings. Reminiscent of the Dublin *Madonna*, in particular, are: *Dominican Saint with Christ and adorer*, Santa Sabina, Rome; *Annunciation with Cardinal Torquemada*, Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome; *Madonna and Child with Saints*, San Pietro, Fondi. All are illustrated in B. BERENSON: *Italian Pictures of the Renaissance; Central Italian and North Italian Schools*, London [1968], Vol.III, Pl.1092, 1094, 1089.