

## VALE ROYAL ABBEY HERALDRY

Today the old mansion house of Vale Royal Abbey is both a golf club, function venue and apartments. The original medieval abbey has long gone with almost nothing to show for save a few stones. Following the Dissolution, the abbey's domestic ranges were transformed by the Holcroft family, who purchased the property from the Crown, into a family residence and from 1616 it became the seat of the Cholmondeley family, later the Lords Delamere until 1947.

The heraldic displays at Vale Royal are to be seen in stained glass in a window along the west passage of the ground floor, which is largely of 17<sup>th</sup> century date, and on the ceiling and rafters of the great hall on the first floor.



### WEST PASSAGE WINDOW

The window is divided into four panels with a diagonal leaded fretwork with each lozenge being decorated with rose flowers or stems. There are ten armorial illustrations of varying styles and sizes. In most instances it is not possible to say why the arms are in the window.

Top left are the arms of the Birkenhead family with the legend 'Armes de Brekhed': *Argent (Sable), three garbs Or*: the background to the shield ought to be Sable (black). Below are the arms described as 'Armes de Horvell', these seem to be those of Hockenhull: *Argent, thee ass's heads erased Sable*.

At the top of the second panel is a piece of Dutch origin, perhaps from Utrecht. This shows a gold shield with two silver pitchers and the initials 'DK' flanked by cherubs. The letters refer to the name DuerKant, and the pitchers are a pun on the name 'kan' in Dutch, meaning a pot or jug, hence the English word 'can'. The legend beneath has the name 'Aert Symonsz Duerkant' and the year 1650.<sup>i</sup>

Next is an ornate wreath encircling an achievement of arms: *Quarterly, 1 & 4, Azure, three boars heads erased Or* [for Gordon], *2 & 3 Gules, a tilting spear fessways proper between three ancient crowns Or* [for Grant] *within a bordure*



*embattled quarterly Argent and Or.* These are the arms of the Gordon family, baronets, of Nitton, Isle of Wight, but I am unable to find a connection to the Cholmondleys.<sup>ii</sup>



Beneath is a very flamboyant rendering of a coat of arms and crest. The arms appear as *Argent, three harrows Sable*, and the crest as *an harrow Sable between two wings elevated Argent*: the mantling is *Argent and Sable*. The style is most certainly Germanic and these are probably the arms of de Vos (or Vosse) of Utrecht, Netherlands.<sup>iii</sup> Perhaps this panel was particularly chosen as an allusion to Roger Hareware, alias Harrow, the last abbot of Vale Royal.



At the top of the next window panel is another Dutch coat of arms. This has the legend 'Maijken Joosten, widow Van Jan Gerritsz Broeck' and the date 1650. The arms are: *Argent, a crossbow in pale proper impaling Or, three lozenges, 2 and 1, Gules*. Maijken Joosten will probably be identical to Marichgen Joosten Ruijs (Ruijsch), daughter of Joost Jansz Ruijs (Ruijsch), who married Jan Gerritsz Broeck in Utrecht on 1 April 1620. ("Maijken" and "Marichgen" are both old Dutch versions of the name Maria, Mary.)<sup>iv</sup>



Below is a cartouche with a silver shield bearing a gold portcullis. Heraldically the tinctures cannot be correct. There is no explanation for this image.



At the bottom is a cartouche containing the Royal Arms with France and England quartered with Scotland and Ireland. The supporters: *dexter, a lion rampant guardant or imperially crowned*, for England, and *sinister, a unicorn rampant Argent*, for Scotland. The rear part of the lion is missing having been replaced by some odd stained glass, likewise the crest is not shown but what was probably in place at one time has been replaced by some further odd stained glass. The motto, *Dieu et mon Droit* ('God is my Right'), is shown in the surrounding Garter. These Royal Arms were in use between 1603 and 1707.



At the top of the next panel are the arms of the Davenport family of Calveley or Weltrough: *Argent, a chevron between three cross-crosslets fitchy Sable, a crescent for difference*. Beneath with the legend 'Meynewaryng' are the arms of the Mainwaring family, a branch of which in the Tudor and Stuart periods resided at neighbouring Marton Hall: *Argent, two bars Gules*.



The Dutch panels can be explained by the fact that the Netherlands was famous for being a source of a large amount of armorial stained glass which appeared in England during the 17<sup>th</sup> century due to the decommissioning of stained glass from earlier more aristocratic or Catholic periods, thus making such objects easily available and relatively cheap. These small windowpanes were often collected by the gentry on their travels and then reused in their own homes.





## THE GREAT HALL

Applied to the plasterwork and rafters of the ceiling of the Great Hall are a series of armigerous shields relating to Cheshire families and some to marriages of the Cholmondeley family. The inscription along the horizontal struts gives the date 1868 and it seems that at that time an earlier similarly painted ceiling of 1824 was replaced. Within the seven bays, the escutcheons are in pairs, angled towards each other, with four to a bay.

Most have the Cholmondeley coat: *Gules, in chief two esquire's helms in chief Argent and in base a or*, paired with another.

Bay One *Gules, a fess erminois between three boar's heads couped Or* [Beckett] with Cholmondeley. Cholmondeley with *Argent two bars Sable a crescent or for difference* [Brereton of Malpas]. Opposite. Cholmondeley with *Argent a fret Sable* [Tollemache] and Cholmondeley with *Argent, a fess with three martlets in chief Gules* [Cheyney]. The appearance of the Brereton coat of arms may refer to William Cholmondeley's marriage in the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century to Elizabeth, daughter of Sir William Brereton of Brereton and Ellena Egerton. The use of the crescent would suggest a member of the Breretons of Malpas, but so far, I cannot trace any such marriage. The Tollemache arms are in recognition of the marriage between Thomas Cholmondeley (1627-1702) and Jane (died 1666), daughter of Lionel Tollemache of Helmingham, Suffolk.



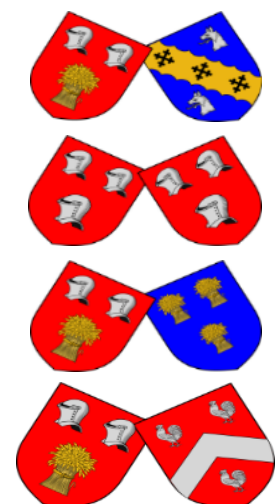
Bay Two. Cholmondeley with *Argent, a bull passant within a bordure bezanty, in sinister chief on a canton per pale Azure and Gules a harp or [????]* and Cholmondeley with *Or, a raven Sable* [Corbet]. Opposite. Cholmondeley and *quarterly Argent and Gules, in the second and third a fret Or* [Dutton] and *Argent, a cross patonce Azure* [Malpas barony] with *Argent, a cross patonce Azure* [Malpas barony]. Richard Cholmondeley, who lived during the reigns of kings Edward IV and Henry VII, married twice first to Elizabeth daughter of Sir Roger Corbet of Moreton Corbet, and secondly, Alionor, daughter of Sir Thomas Dutton of Dutton, and sister and heir to her brother Piers Dutton.



Bay Three. *Gules, three pheons Argent* [Malpas, later Egerton] with *Azure, six garbs, three, two and one, Or* [Hugh Kevelioc, earl of Chester] and Cholmondeley with *quarterly per fess indented Gules and Or* [Bromley]. Opposite. Cholmondeley with *Gules, a lion rampant or a bordure engrailed Argent* [Grey?] and Cholmondeley with *Argent, a chevron between three crosses crosslet fitchy Sable* [Davenport]. The original ancestor of the Cholmondeleys is said to have been William Belward who married Tanglust, illegitimate daughter of Hugh Kevelioc, earl of Chester. The Bromley arms are from a marriage in the time of King Richard II between Richard Cholmondeley of Cholmondeley and Anne, daughter of Sir John Bromley of Baddington



Bay Four. Cholmondeley with *Azure, on a bend engrailed Or, between two wolf's heads erased Argent, three crosses crosslet* [Cowper of Chester] and *Gules, three helms Argent* [Colmondeley] with the same version of the Cholondley arms. Opposite. Cholmondeley with *Azure, three garbs Or* [Blundeville, Earl of Chester] and Cholmondeley with *Gules, a chevron between three capons Argent* [Capenhurst]. The Cowper arms allude to the marriage of Thomas Cholmondeley (1726-1779) to Dorothy (1745-1786), daughter and heiress of Edmund Cowper of Overleigh, Chester. In the time of King Henry IV, William Cholmondeley married Maud daughter and heiress of Thomas Capenhurst of Capenhurst.



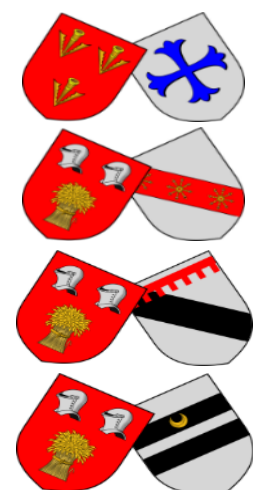
Bay Five. Cholmondley with *quarterly Vert and Argent, in first and fourth three eagles displayed in fess Or, in second and third two foxes salient countersalient in saltire, the sinister surmounting the dexter, Gules* [Williams-Wynn of Wynnstay] and Cholmondeley with *Argent, a fret Sable* [Tollemache]. Opposite. Cholmondeley with *or, a saltire Sable* [Helsby] and Cholmondeley with *Azure, two bars Argent, on a lozenge Sable a wolf's head erased Or* [Wilbraham]. Thomas Cholmondeley (1767-1855) married Henrietta Elizabeth daughter of Sir William Watkins Wynn of Wynnstay in 1810. The Tollemache links have already been referred to.



Bay Six. Cholmondeley with *Argent a greyhound passant Sable* [Holford] and Cholmondeley with *Gules, four fusils in pale Or* [FitzNigel, baron of Halton]. Opposite. Cholmondeley with *Azure, an estoile of six points issuing from a crescent Argent* [Minshull] and Cholmondeley with *vert, six mullets, three, two and one, or* [???]. The Holford arms refers to the marriage of Sir Hugh Cholmondeley of Cholmondeley (1585-1601) to Mary (1562-1625) heiress of her father Christopher Holford of Holford. Those of Minshull come from the marriage of Thomas Cholmondeley (1595-1653) to Elizabeth (died 1661) daughter and heiress of John Minshull of Minshull.



Bay seven. *Gules, three pheons Argent* [Malpas, later Egerton] with *Argent, a cross patonce Azure* [Malpas barony] and Cholmondeley with *Argent, on a bend Gules three escarbuncle or* [Thornton]. Opposite. Cholmondeley with *Argent, a bend Sable, over all a label of seven points Gules* [St Pierre] and Cholmondeley with *Argent two bars Sable a crescent Or for difference* [Brereton of Malpas]. The Cholmondeley family claimed a share of the ancient Norman barony of Malpas of which the manor of Cholmondeley was a part. The complicated descent of the barony included the families of Malpas, Pulford, Egerton and St. Pierre.



The bays are linked by purlins on which is written an extract from Psalm 127 of the King James Bible: “Except the Lord build the house: their labour is but lost that build it. Except the Lord keep the city: the watchmen walk but in vain.” The modern

interpretation of this is: “Without the help of the Lord, it is useless to build a home or to guard a city”. In addition, the initials “H” and “A”, the significance of which at the time of writing are not clear, along with the date 1868.

At each end of the hall there is a rafter embedded into the wall and on each there are two shields each with the capital letters “H” and “A”. The ceiling bays are separated by a series of six decorated rafters. On each rafter, and repeated on each side, there are pairs of shields. These are mainly the arms of the various Norman earls of Chester. From the northern end, entering from the library, first, *Sable, three bull’s heads cabossed Or* (last tincture should be *Argent*) [Bulkeley] and *Or, a cross within a bordure Azure* [????????????]. Next, *Azure, six garbs, three, two and one, Or* [Hugh Kevelioc, Earl of Chester] and *Or, three piles meeting in base, Gules* [John le Scot, seventh earl of Chester]. Third, *Gules, a lion rampant Or* [Ranulph Gernons, fourth earl of Chester] and *Gules, semy of cross-crosslets Or, a wolf’s head erased Or (should be Argent)* [Richard, second earl of Chester]. Next, *Or, a lion rampant Gules (should be Gules, a lion rampant Argent)* [Ranulph Meschins, third earl of Chester] and *Azure, a wolf’s head erased Argent* [Hugh Lupus, first earl of Chester]. Fifth, *Gules, three lions passant guardant in pale Or dimidiating Azure three garbs Or* [Earldom of Chester] and *Azure, three garbs Or* [Ranulph Blundeville, sixth earl of Chester]. Lastly, *Azure, an estoile of six points issuing from a crescent Argent* [Minshull] and *Argent a greyhound passant Sable* [Holford].



<sup>i</sup> See note iii below.

<sup>ii</sup> J.W.Papworth, *An Ordinary of British Armorial*, vol II (1874), p. 925

<sup>iii</sup> For the information on this coat of arms I am indebted to Richard Charles Frederick Baker of Whitstable, Kent, who posted a reply to an enquiry made via Facebook in October 2018, citing: J. B. Rietstap, *Armorial General* 2nd ed. (1887), reprinted by Heraldry Today 1965 - Vol 2, p. 1026. Also, to Roy de Ruyers who wrote “De Vos from the city of Utrecht. They were mayors of Utrecht and held high offices in the province of Utrecht, between 1450-1550.”

<sup>iv</sup> For the information about the Dutch cartouches I am indebted to Olivier Mertens, The Hague, Netherlands, who posted a reply to an enquiry made via Facebook in September 2018. He wrote: “They are indeed Dutch and the names can be seen written in the cartouches: on the left Maijken Joosten, widow of Jan Gerritsz Broeck (dated 1650) and on the right Aert Symonsz Duerkant (also dated 1650). The letters "DK" refer to his name (DuerKant), as well as the pitchers ("kan" in Dutch). Typical Dutch civilian heraldry, very charming.

Maijken Joosten will probably be identical to Marichgen Joosten Ruijs (Ruijsch), daughter of Joost Jansz Ruijs (Ruijsch), who married Jan Gerritsz Broeck in Utrecht on 1 April 1620. (“Maijken” and “Marichgen” are both old Dutch versions of the name Maria, Mary.) In the 17th century, the name Duerkant (Duercant) can be found in Utrecht as well, so I wouldn’t be surprised if these window panels originate from that city.”

