

3 OVERMANTELS which once belonged to the Cobbold family

January 2018

Because of some strong similarities I became confused as to which was which!

Having sorted it out I thought to share it with you. They are all now in the care of Christchurch Mansion which was given to the Borough of Ipswich by Felix Thornley Cobbold in 1895. I give a brief description of each headed by the name of the room in the mansion in which each is housed.

In the **Servants' Hall** will be found a **Jacobean Overmantel** from the early to mid. 17th century which may originally have been designed for 32 Carr St. in Ipswich. In those days timber framed houses were as well decorated as Medieval churches and this is an exceptional example of highly skilled carving. The figures represent allegories of Faith with the cross, Hope with the anchor, Charity caring for children and the vice of Vanity with mirror and serpent. The house became the **Half Moon Inn** and when this was demolished the overmantel was taken to Holy Wells (as it was then spelled) where it was installed in the Library. In the fireplace is a cast iron fireback bearing a **Charles II** Coat of Arms dated 1660.

In the **Wingfield Room** is some remarkable carved panelling which originated in the house of **Sir Humphrey Wingfield** (c1485-1552) in Tacket Street, Ipswich which later became the **Tankard Inn**. It was installed in celebration of the marriage of Sir Humphrey to **Anne Wiseman** in 1509 and depicts 'The Judgement of Paris' from Greek mythology. This too was taken with its associated panelling to Holy Wells when the house ceased to be an inn.

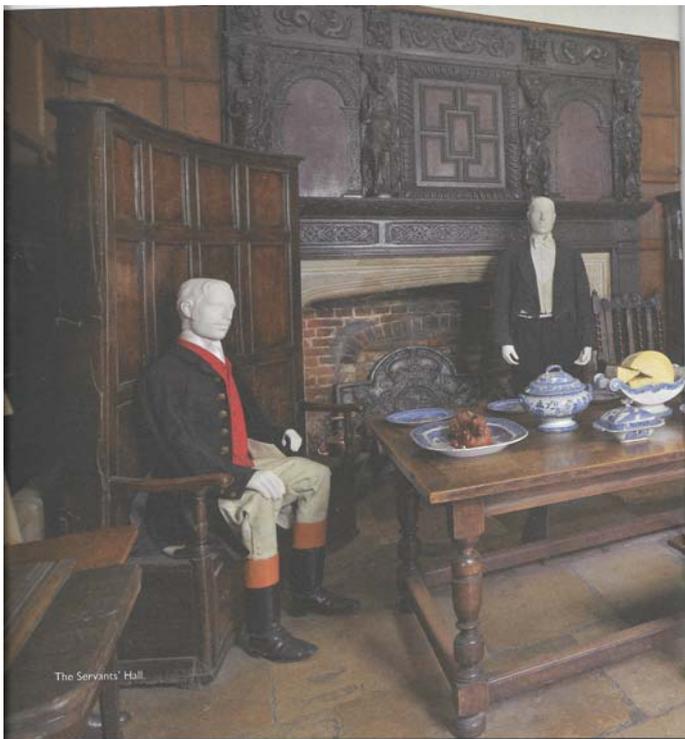
In the **Lower Tudor Room**, is installed the most interesting of the three. It is the **Eldred Overmantel** from the house of **Thomas Eldred** (1561-1624) in Fore Street, Ipswich which became the **Neptune Inn**. The overmantel celebrates Thomas Eldred's exploits as the navigator on **Lord Cavendish's** 1586-1588 voyage around the world. The purpose of the voyage was to raid and plunder Spanish Colonies along the west coast of Central and South America. As England was at war with Spain the men were classed as privateers, not pirates. Thomas Cavendish took three ships on his voyage: the *Desire*, the *Content* and the *Hugh Gallant*, with 123 sailors and fighters. The ships left England on 21st July 1586 and took enough provisions and ammunition for a 2-year voyage. The ships arrived in South America in March 1587 and then spent the next eight months attacking Spanish ships, towns and settlements. When they attacked a town in North Peru the men discovered a hidden store of 25lbs of silver. During the eight months of privateering many crewmen and fighters died which meant there were not enough men to crew all three ships. The smallest ship (the *Hugh Gallant*) was sunk and the men moved to other ships.

Thomas Cavendish had received information that a great Spanish ship, the *Santa Anna* was expected from the Philippines with a cargo of gold, silks, satins, damasks and other valuables. The *Desire* and the *Content* lay in wait and when the *Santa Anna* arrived there was a five to six hour battle. With his ship in danger of sinking the Spanish captain surrendered on the promise that the lives of his crew would be spared. Thomas Cavendish transferred as much of the cargo of the *Santa Anna* to his own ships as was possible. He left the Spanish crew on shore with food, sails to make tents and planks to make boats. Just before departure he gave them arms so that they could defend themselves.

In November 1587 the *Desire* began the journey home to England with the *Content* to follow. The *Desire* sailed across the Pacific to the Ladrones in 43 days where the men traded bits of iron for fresh food. Having travelled over 5,500 miles the *Desire* got back to Plymouth on 9th September 1588 and Thomas Cavendish sent a report to the Lord Chamberlain saying they had “destroyed 19 enemy ships and captured a great galleon”. The voyage had been a great financial success bringing back treasure worth about a million pounds. The *Content* was never heard of again.

The *Desire* sailed up the Thames to Greenwich where Thomas Cavendish entertained Queen Elizabeth I “in a cabin hung with gold and silver”. As his navigator Thomas Eldred must take much of the praise for the success of the voyage. His overmantel comprises three panels; the first a terrestrial globe bearing the dates of his circumnavigation, the second his ship, presumably the *Desire* and the third his own portrait as an old man holding in his right hand an equinoxial dial having the date 1602.

After a spell in the dining room at Holy Wells this fine overmantel, together with the other two were given to Christchurch by John Dupuis Cobbold (1861-1929), after whose death Holy Wells was sold and later demolished.



Jacobean Overmantel in the Servants' Hall



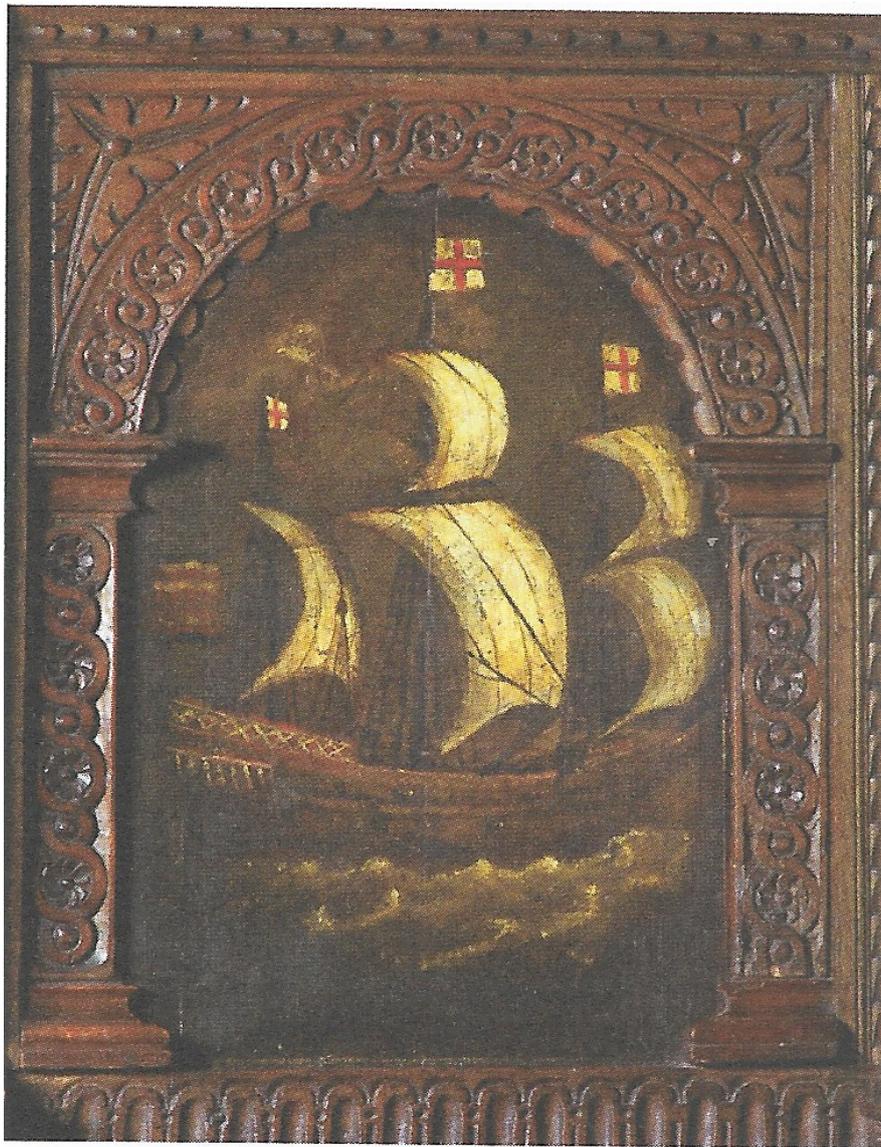
The Wingfield Overmantel



Sir Anthony Wingfield's Mansion in Tacket St. Ipswich, later the Tankard Inn



The Eldred Overmantel (dressed for Christmas)



Detail from the Eldred Overmantel.