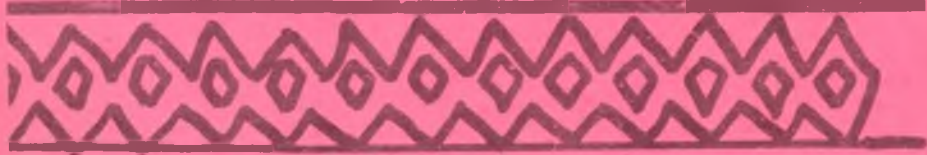


THE
FLOWER POT PLOT



Three embroidered panels, Dining Hall, Rochester Wing,
Stockwell College of Education, Bromley, Kent.



The college wishes in particular to thank, the children; their Headmaster Mr. G. R. Lloyd, the class teacher Mrs. P. Mountford, and all the other teachers who helped; students; college tutors in history, drama, dress and embroidery, and in particular Mrs. Jennifer Campbell who guided the whole project through with patience, industry, charm and a glowing imagination. All members of college and their guests will enjoy this lively record of an episode in both local and national history.

THE EMBROIDERED PANELS

The three panels, each ten feet in length, record the story of the Flower Pot Plot in fabric, net, beads, wools, leather and thread against a background of black hessian.

The Orchard at Bromley

The Kitchen of the Palace at Bromley

The Court at Westminster

The panels are the result of team work between tutors and students of Stockwell College and the staff and children of Burnt Ash Junior School, Bromley, Kent. During the Spring Term 1969 a fourth year class studied the history of the Old Palace and in particular the thrilling story of the arrest and trial of Bishop Thomas Sprat in 1692. The investigations and studies were recorded and expressed in free dramatization, writing and drawing. Steeped in the story the three panels were finally planned and worked by the children. All members of the group contributed several pieces to the whole. To retain interest and a sense of scale the figures were worked first, many in printed fabrics, with lace and braiding to reduce stitching. The final details of stitching were completed by students and tutors. Each panel was then stretched and mounted professionally.

The panels were hung in the Rochester Dining Hall in May 1970 in the presence of the present Bishop of Rochester, the Right Reverend David Say and Mrs. Say.

THE FLOWER POT PLOT

In 1692, Thomas Sprat, Bishop of Rochester, was the victim of a "strange and malignant attack", made upon him by Robert Young and Stephen Blackhead, both men convicted of "infamous crimes" and at the time prisoners in Newgate. Sprat published an account of the plot in a book entitled, "A Relation of the Late Wicked Contrivance of Stephen Blackhead and Robert Young, against the lives of Several Persons, by Forging an Association under their Hands."

The attack on Bishop Sprat was made when Young, anxious to curry favour with the government, "discovered" a pretended plot for the restoration of James II. He drew up a paper and forged the signatures of Lords Marlborough, Cornbury and Salisbury and of Archbishop Sancroft and Bishop Sprat. He then had to get the paper into a hiding place in the house of one of the persons implicated. His accomplice, Blackhead, was sent to Bromley, the residence of Bishop Sprat, and being unable to obtain access to any of the apartments of the Bishop, dropped the paper into a flower pot standing in a room near the kitchen. Information was then given to the Privy Council, that if search was made at Bromley, especially among the flower pots, a treasonable document would be found.

Bishop Sprat, completely unaware of what was happening, was taken by surprise by the visit of two officials on May 7th, 1692. ".....as I was walking in the Orchard at Bromley, Meditating on something I design'd to Preach the next Day; that I saw a Coach

and four Horses stop at the outer Gate; out of which two Persons alighted. Immediately I went towards them, believing they were some of my Friends, coming to give me a Visit." In fact they had come to arrest him on suspicion of high treason. He was searched and had to submit his keys so that the whole house could be searched and he recorded, "In all the rooms I observed they very carefully pryed into every part of the chimneys; the Messenger putting his hand into every Flower Pot which I then somewhat smiled at, but since I found he had much reason so to do." The Bishop then goes on to describe how they took with them some of his papers and then, "They carried Me away in the Coach. And so between Ten and Eleven at Night, we arrived at Whitehall, and I was brought to my Lord Nottingham, whom I found alone in his office." The forged document, however, had not been discovered.

Sprat protested his innocence to Nottingham and claimed that "There must be some great Mistake or black villainy in this Business", and Lord Nottingham expressed his surprise that Sprat should be implicated and informed him that he was to be questioned the next day when he was taken before the Committee of the Council at six o'clock. His papers at his house at Westminster were searched but nothing incriminating was found. After being questioned by the Committee, a "select Number of the Lords of the Council at my Lord Nottingham's Lodgings", he remained in confinement until May 18th, when he addressed a letter to the Earl of Nottingham asking him for his liberty on the ground of his innocence and impaired health. The letter was read in Cabinet Council that day and at ten o'clock the Bishop was

discharged and later returned to Bromley. Here he remained, little dreaming of a "worse Mischief", hanging over his head.

This "worse Mischief" was due to the action of Young. While Bishop Sprat had been in custody, Blackhead had paid another visit to Bromley, and taking the forged paper from its hiding place, he brought it back to Young, whose wife carried it to the Secretary of State. On June 10th and 13th therefore, the Bishop was examined again before the Privy Council and confronted with his accusers. Young persisted with great impudence against the strongest evidence; but the resolution of Blackhead gradually gave way. He confessed, when closely questioned, that he put the paper in the flower pot in the Bishop's chimney, upon the instigation of Robert Young. At length no doubt remained of the Bishop's innocence and he was acquitted.

To the end of his life Bishop Sprat observed the anniversary of the day with gratitude to the Almighty for his escape. Later in that same year he published his account of these happenings, which came to be known as "The Flower Pot Plot."

Major Sources:

"A Relation of the Wicked Contrivance of Stephen Blackhead and Robert Young, against the lives of several persons, by forging an association under their hands."

John Sprat, Bishop of Rochester, 1693.

Hasted, E. A History of Kent, 4v 1778-98 contains print of the earlier building (facing p.94, vol.I).

Both available in Bromley Local History Room.