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# Aspects of Chilham

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## THE HALL CEILING AT CHILHAM CASTLE

It is fortunate that Sir Edmund Davis, who owned Chilham castle between the world wars, employed Sir Herbert Baker, a Kentish architect of international renown, who was well-versed in his county's architecture.

After remodelling the hall (demolishing one wall & building another) Baker selected for the new ceiling a Jacobean template entirely suitable for Sir Dudley Digges's house - a copy of one at Knole, executed about 1604-6 for Thomas Sackville, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Dorset, by Richard Dungan, the King's plasterer.

The ceiling can be found in the gallery hung with copies of Raphael's cartoons which provides the ceremonial approach from the Great Chamber to the principal bedroom known as the King's Room.

Robert, 7<sup>th</sup> Lord Sackville in the present-day guide to his home at Knole, produced for the National Trust, describes the *“serpentine ribs which give a marvellous rippling effect of light & shade seen down the whole length of the gallery. The spaces between the ribs are .... filled by shallow reliefs of botanical emblems, probably taken by the plasterer from the woodcuts of some late 16th-century herbal”*

This *“rippling effect”* is enhanced by the big bay window at the far end & the gallery's great length (some 37 yards). Chilham is less than half as long & has windows only to one side.

It was decided that the flowers at Knole should point up from their soil bedding towards their destination in the King's Room, but to my eye they look better when heading in the opposite direction with the flowers uppermost.

At Chilham, as you enter the building, the flowers are set sideways, so the best effect is seen when emerging from Sir Edmund's study, rather than his dining room at the opposite end.

It is sad that whilst the name of the creator of the 17<sup>th</sup> century original is on record, we have no idea who reproduced it so accurately at Chilham a mere 90 years ago.

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