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# THE COAT OF ARMS

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# THE HERALDIC SCREENS OF MIDDLEWICH, CHESHIRE

ANTHONY BOSTOCK MA

## Abstract

*Two screens in St Michael's church Middlewich which have not previously excited the interest of antiquarians are in the process of being conserved by the Middlewich Heritage Trust with the assistance of the Heritage Lottery Fund. They bear the date 1632, and were commissioned by Peter Venables (1603–1669), as a testament to family pride in lineage, celebrating coats of arms inherited through heiresses, and marriage alliances spanning over four hundred years. Venables and his brother-in-law Lord Cholmondeley were two of the wealthiest men in Cheshire at the outbreak of the Civil War, and suffered greatly as supporters of the crown. The many quarterings and impalements representing heiresses, and other marriage alliances, are delineated, and comparisons made with contemporary heraldic Visitations and a funeral certificate, from which some surprising discrepancies are apparent.*

## Introduction

In his monumental work *Old Cheshire Churches*, Raymond Richards described the heraldic screens in St Michael and All Angels, Middlewich, Cheshire, as the church's piece de resistance.<sup>1</sup> These two Jacobean oak screens, a rare survival, in form unique in this county, and perhaps in the country, may be found tucked away in a room at the base of the church tower. They contain a treasure of local heraldry dating back to the thirteenth century and are of much value to the student of local history and genealogy, but are presently in a poor condition.

The screens were executed in 1632 for Peter Venables, baron of Kinderton, and were originally located in the chancel. There were two former chantry chapels or oratories to either side of the east end of the church. The chapel in the north side was the original Kinderton chantry and contained monuments to various barons of Kinderton, including the last Venables baron, Peter Venables (d.1679). Here was

<sup>1</sup> Raymond Richards, *Old Cheshire churches*, revised and enlarged with a supplementary survey relating to the lesser old chapels of Cheshire. (Manchester 1973) pp. 2–16.

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also a brass for Elizabeth Venables née Brereton (d.1591) wife of Thomas Venables (d.1606). Ormerod observed in 1817 that this chapel was enclosed by an oak screen which had the arms of Venables impaling Cholmondeley and Venables impaling Gargrave.<sup>2</sup> He described a second chapel in the chancel which can only have been on the opposite side. It was purchased by the baron of Kinderton in 1587 on the condition that he repaired it. Above the entrance to this chapel was written “Peeter Venables 1632”. Sir Stephen Glynne, visiting Middlewich in the Victorian era, observed wooden screens from the age of James I within the arches on the sides of the chancel, i.e those leading to the side chapels.<sup>3</sup> By 1882, when Helsby published his revised account of Ormerod, the screens, being in a dilapidated condition, had been removed to the tower.<sup>4</sup>

The Venables family were of Norman origin: their name stems from a settlement of that name situated half-way along the road between Paris and Rouen.<sup>5</sup> The family’s progenitor, Gilbert de Venables, appears in the Domesday Survey and was probably the original recipient of the barony which was one of eight created by Hugh Lupus, the first Norman Earl of Chester. Although the smallest barony, it survived the longest, with members of the same family using the title for six hundred years: the last of the line, Peter Venables, died on 19th January 1679, leaving an only daughter from whom descend a family who were elevated to the peerage as the Barons Venables-Vernon.<sup>6</sup>

The two screens, which both bear the date 1632, were commissioned by Peter Venables (1603–1669), as a testament to family pride in lineage, celebrating coats of arms inherited through heiresses, and marriage alliances spanning over four hundred years. Four marriages were recorded with repeated impalements, these being Peter’s own, and those of his father Thomas Venables (d.1606). Peter, the twenty-first baron, figured in the political scene of the day: he served as a Member of Parliament for the county in 1641–2, and in 1643 was appointed Sheriff of Cheshire. During the Civil War he actively supported the Royalist cause, alongside his brother-in-law Lord Cholmondeley. The two men received the largest fines of any Cheshiremen in 1648 as Royalist “delinquents”, Lord Cholmondeley being fined £7,742 and Venables himself £6,150.<sup>7</sup> Middlewich church was the scene of a battle between Royalist and Parliamentary forces in 1643. Peter Venables seems to have had a particular interest in local history, genealogy and heraldry. He was, for instance, a patron of Daniel King’s *Vale Royal of England* (1656), the first published topographical work on Cheshire. Vale Royal included the first history of Cheshire, written by William Smith, Rouge

<sup>2</sup> George Ormerod, *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester*, vol 3 (London 1819) pp.100–1.

<sup>3</sup> J.A. Atkinson, Notes on the churches of Cheshire by the late Sir Stephen Glynne, Chetham Society New Series vol 32 (Manchester 1894) p.25.

<sup>4</sup> George Ormerod, *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester* (2nd ed. revised by T. Helsby, (1882), vol. 3 pp. 182–3.

<sup>5</sup> Katherine Keats-Rohan, *Domesday people, a prosopography of persons occurring in English documents 1066–1166*, vol 1: *Domesday Book* (Woodbridge 2002)p.212.

<sup>6</sup> George Ormerod, *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester* (2nd ed. revised by T. Helsby, (1882), vol. 3 , p.196.

<sup>7</sup> J.S.Morrill, *Cheshire 1630–60: county government and society during the English Revolution* (Oxford 1974) p.206.

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Dragon Pursuivant of Arms, in 1585. Venables financed the inclusion within the work of eleven plates illustrating 520 escutcheons of Cheshire families.<sup>8</sup> The heraldic work was probably carried out by either Randle I Holme of Chester (1570–1655), who was a deputy herald of the College of Arms in Cheshire, Lancashire and North Wales, or by his son, Randle II (1601–59) who was deputy herald in succession to his father and an active genealogist.

St Michael's church, with the help of Middlewich Heritage Trust, has so far received £7,700 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for an exciting conservation project. This project is part of Phase 2 of the church's overall restoration project. Made possible by money from the National Lottery, the project focuses on the two oak screens painted with heraldic shields. This HLF funded project will produce a Conservation Management Plan which is required before any restoration work on the screens is undertaken. On 17 May 2017, the screens were assessed by a conservator and a timber specialist who have reported on the state of the screens and made recommendations for their future. For the first time in two centuries the reverse of the screens was revealed. Further blazons have been seen and recorded. Clearly at one time these screens were in a position where they could be observed from both sides.

It is somewhat unfortunate, though not surprising, that some of the colours have either faded or become discoloured. White, tarnished with age and layers of varnish, appears yellow and it is difficult to differentiate between blue, red, green and black tinctures, with most appearing as black. Added to this, it appears that at some time attempts have been made to re-draw charges and to touch-up the colours incorrectly. Approval on further funding is now awaited so that the next step can begin. This will involve the dismantling of the screens and their shipment to suitable premises for the cleaning and conservation work to be undertaken. The Conservation Plan will also determine their eventual re-siting in the body of the church after restoration.

### **The Arrangement of the two Screens**

The 'Venables Screen' is now positioned on the south wall of the tower, and the 'Baron's Screen' on the north wall. The screens are large. The shields on the Venables Screen measure 14" high by 12" wide set in frames which are 40" (B) and 49" (D) wide: the overall height is about 5 feet. The side panels on the Barons Screen are 31" high by 26" wide. The central tablet on the Barons Screen (G) is 64" high by 53½" wide and this is surmounted by a plaque and a round tablet making the overall height 90". The overall length of each screen is about 15 feet.

### **The Venables Screen** (from the South East chapel)

Silhouettes by John Curry of Middlewich

Obverse shields:

Above B: ANO.DNI 1632 Above D: PEETER VENABLES.

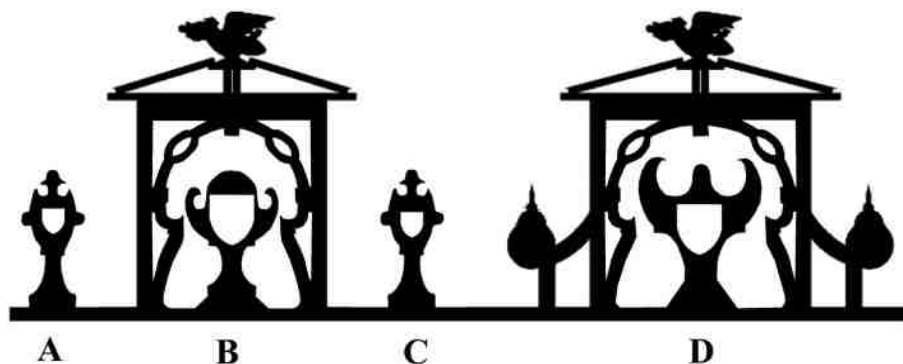
A. Thomas Venables impaling Elizabeth Brereton

B. Thomas Venables impaling Elizabeth Brereton (quartered arms)

<sup>8</sup> Daniel King, *The Vale Royal of England, or the County Palatine of Chester illustrated* (London 1656).



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C. Thomas Venables impaling Anne Gargrave

D. Thomas Venables impaling Anne Gargrave (quartered arms).

Reverse shields:

A: Thomas Venables impaling Anne Gargrave

B: Peter Venables impaling Mary Wilbraham (quartered arms)

C: Thomas Venables impaling Anne Gargrave.

D: Peter Venables impaling Francis Cholmondeley (quartered arms as in E)

The bar of the frame above B bears three crests in small rectangular panels. The left hand has a muzzled bear's head issuing out of a gold coronet: this is the crest of the Brereton family. The centre panel shows the Venables crest of the wyvern devouring a child, on a blue and white wreath. The right-hand panel has what seems to be a bird with its wings raised standing on a wreath of silver and black, which represents the crest of the Gargrave family which was a falcon rising. Above D there is a bar with three small panels, but at the time of visiting these were so dirty that no features could be ascertained, though they are likely to be the same.



*Figure 1: The three painted crests.*

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Figure 2: The dragon crest.

Mounted on the top of each 'house' frame, as though perched on a roof, is the Venables crest – *a dragon argent, (pierced with a golden arrow), devouring a child, and resting on a weir argent, banded azure*. When this crest was officially granted in letters patent by Lawrence Dalton, Norroy King of Arms, on 30 October 1560, it was stated that this dramatic crest arose from a local legend concerning the brave adventure of an early member of the family.<sup>9</sup> According to the family many centuries ago, a terrible dragon lived in Moston, near Warmingham, Cheshire, which devoured everyone it laid hands on. A Thomas Venables, regardless of his own life, set out to slay the dragon and managed to do so by shooting it with an arrow just as it was eating a child. The story, which certainly has a familiar patriotic ring about it, also led Dalton to grant an 'augmentation of honour' amongst the Venables quarterings: *Vert a dragon argent, pierced with an arrow or*. The contemporary place names of Dragons Pool, Moston, and Dragons Lane, Warmingham, refer to this fanciful story.

There is a more plausible reason for the dragon, which at Middlewich was invariably depicted as a wyvern. William le Neve showed Venables quartering *Vert a wyvern argent* c 1500, and ascribed the arms to Moston of Moston, but the local

<sup>9</sup> Ormerod 2nd ed vol 3 p.236, citing BL MS Harley 139 p.39.

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usage of the wyvern goes back much further: the Warmingham family bore *Sable a wyvern or* in the fourteenth century.<sup>10</sup> The Venables family possessed lands in Moston and Warmingham, and the manor of Moston was granted to William Venables and his wife Blanche, in 1405, by a man named Welch, probably acting as a trustee.<sup>11</sup> The arms of Moston and Warmingham are recorded in the armorial plates commissioned by Peter Venables for *Vale Royal*.

### **The Barons Screen** (from the north east chapel of the Barons of Kinderton)

This is arguably the more important of the screens because of the large central tablet and the information it portrays.



Obverse shields:

E: Peter Venables impaling Frances Cholmondeley (quartered arms).

F: Peter Venables impaling Frances Cholmondeley

G: xx impalements of Venables marriages (Venables above)

H: Peter Venables impaling Mary Wilbraham

I: Later (see below)

Reverse shields:

E: Thomas Venables (12 quarterings) impaling Anne Gargrave (6 quarterings).

F: Thomas Venables impaling Elizabeth Brereton

G: Repeat of obverse

H: Thomas Venables impaling Anne Gargrave

I: Blank. Is there a paint layer underneath? A proper assessment of the reverse can only be undertaken once the screens are removed.

<sup>10</sup> DBA vol 4 p.238 for both families.

<sup>11</sup> Ormerod 2nd ed vol 3 pp. 231, 236.



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Figure 3: The Barons Screen.

Panel ('I') must have been completed after 1762 as it shows the arms of George Venables-Vernon, of Sudbury, who, by Letters Patent dated 12 May 1762, was created Lord Vernon, Baron of Kinderton. Born in 1686, he was son to Henry Vernon of Sudbury, Derbyshire, and a grandson of Mary Venables, Peter Venables' sister and heir. As this tablet is of a later date, it is worth considering what was illustrated in 1632. There can be little doubt that the frieze pattern shown on the 'Venables Screen' was repeated – large panels, displaying full 'quartered coats of arms' of marriages, alternating with small round tablets showing the basic family arms of the same marriages. Therefore, this last panel would have shown the quartered arms of Venables impaling the quartered arms of the Wilbraham, thus fully commemorating Peter's two marriages.

Thomas Venables used seven quarterings and his son Peter used twelve. Peter acquired no new quarterings from his mother Elizabeth Brereton, who was not an heraldic heiress. Thomas' seven are not quite in accord with those given in the *Visitation of Cheshire* of 1580.<sup>12</sup>

1. *Azure, two bars argent.* [Venables]
2. *Argent, three piles wavy issuant from a chief sable.* [Eccleston, Lancashire]
3. *Gules, three ostrich feathers erect argent.* [Griggs]
4. *Argent, a cross flory between four martlets gules.* [Golborne of Golborne]
5. *Vert, a wyvern argent.* [Moston, but called an augmentation in 1560]

<sup>12</sup> John Paul Rylands, *The Visitation of Cheshire 1580*, Harleian Society vol 18 (London 1882) p.227. Here the order of the quarterings is 1,4,5,2,7, with 3 and 6 omitted, and 7 labelled as Coton.



Figure 4: Venables impaling Brereton.

6. *Argent, a bend between three pellets sable.* [Coton of Ridware, Staffs.]
7. *Azure, an eagle displayed argent.* [Ridware]

The first wife of Thomas Venables (1543–1606), baron of Kinderton, was Elizabeth, daughter of Sir William Brereton of Brereton; a marriage not only of two neighbouring families, but of two of the most important and influential families in the county. Thomas was betrothed to Elizabeth when aged ten years and eventually the couple had a son, who pre-deceased his father, and two daughters. Following Elizabeth's death in July 1591, Thomas married Anne Gargrave of Nostell Priory, Yorkshire, and had three more children, including Peter, who commissioned the screens. Anne died in 1634, having remarried Sir Edward Bushell of Worcestershire. Her father was Sir Cotton Gargrave, an MP, and son of Sir Thomas Gargrave, Sheriff of Yorkshire in 1583, a Speaker of the House of Commons.

In the descriptions of arms given below, where the surviving versions appear to be incorrect, the correct version is provided in brackets.

The Brereton quarters are:

1. *Argent, two bars sable.* [Brereton]
2. *Azure (gules), three pheons argent.* [Malpas]
3. *Or (argent) a cross bottonny (flory) azure.* [Malpas]

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4. *Ermine (argent), a talbot azure (a lion rampant gules, between three pheons sable)* [Egerton]
5. *Or, two ravens sable.* [Corbet]
6. *Chevronny azure and ermine (ermine, three chevrons gules) on a canton azure (gules) a lion passant or.* [Orreby]
7. *Azure (gules), two lions passant or (argent, plus a label of three points or)* [Strange]

These are in the same order as the quarterings of Brereton of Brereton provided in the 1580 Visitation.<sup>13</sup>

The Gargrave quarters are:

1. *Lozengy argent and sable, on a bend sable, three crescents argent.* [Gargrave]
2. *Argent, on a chief indented gules, three crosses crosslet fitchy or (argent).* [Otterburn]
3. *Gules, a cockerell (looking more like an ostrich) on an escallop or.*
4. *Argent, a chevron between three mullets sable.*
5. *Sable, (three lions passant in bend argent between) two bendlets engrailed argent.* [Browne of Wakefield]
6. *Sable, a cross bottonny (flory) between four annulets or (argent).* [Welles]

We are fortunate to have a record of Anne Gargrave's funeral certificate, but this does not name the families blazoned on her arms, which is partially supplied by the 1585 Visitation of Yorkshire.<sup>14</sup> The third and fourth quarterings are missing from this source. From the pedigree Otterburn was the earliest known heraldic heiress and there were no others until Browne of Wakefield, which means that 2 and 3 must be ancestors of Otterburn. Papworth ascribes to Otterburn *Azure a dunghill cock perched on an escallop or*.<sup>15</sup>

Peter Venables married Mary, daughter of Sir Richard Wilbraham of Woodhey, by whom he had a son and heir, Thomas, born in 1623. Mary seems to have died a few years later.

The Wilbraham quarterings are:

1. *Argent, three bends wavy azure.* [Wilbraham]
2. *Azure, two bars argent, on a canton sable a wolf's head erased of the first.* [Wilbraham]
3. *Argent a cross patonce between four martlets gules, a label of five points gules.* [Golborne of Woodhey]
4. *Argent, on a bend sable three cross-cosslets or.* [Crossley]

<sup>13</sup> *Visitation Cheshire 1580* p.41.

<sup>14</sup> John.Paul. Rylands, *Cheshire and Lancashire Funeral Certificates; A.D. 1600 to 1678*, Record Society (London, 1882), p. 55–6; Joseph Foster, *The Visitation of Yorkshire made in the years 1584–5 by Robert Glover, to which is added the subsequent Visitation made in 1612* (London 1875), p.68.

<sup>15</sup> Papworth, p.295. For possible bearers of *Argent, a chevron between three mullets sable* see DBA vol 2 p.391.



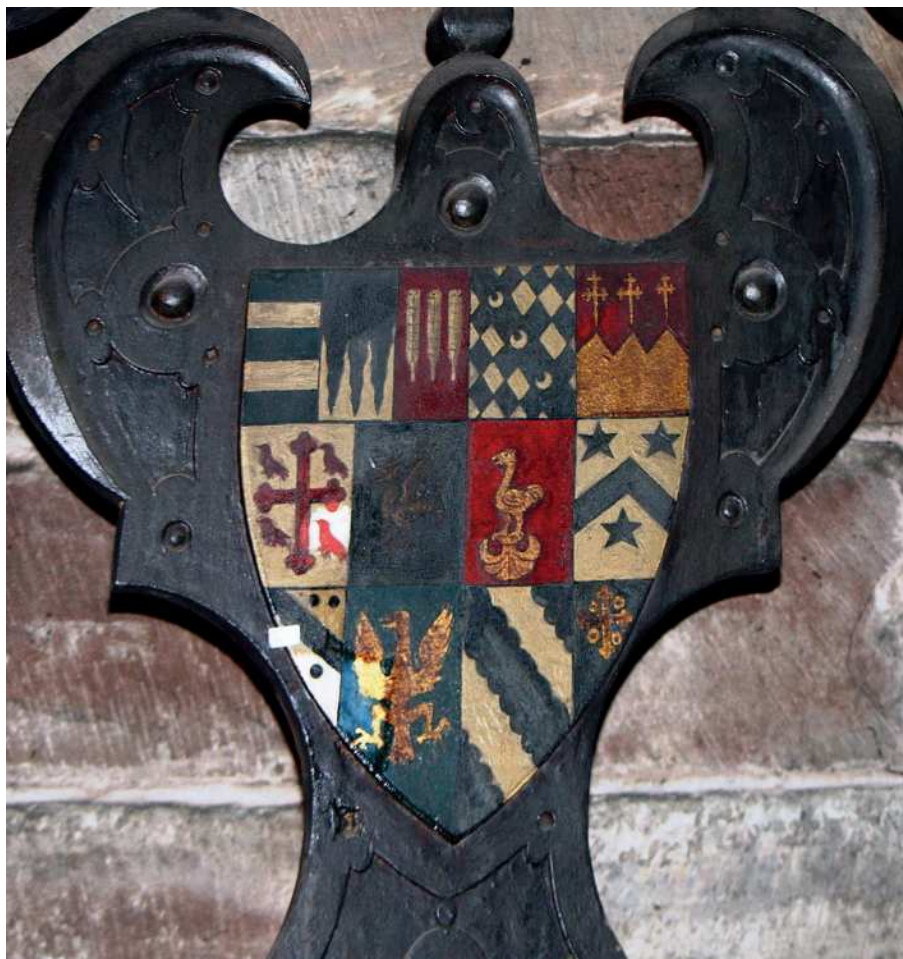


Figure 5: Venables impaling Gargrave.

These arms are as recorded in the *Visitation of Cheshire*, 1580, excepting that the first quarter was not there recorded.<sup>16</sup> In about 1625 Peter Venables made his marriage to Frances, sister to Sir Robert Cholmondeley, baronet (later Lord Cholmondeley, Earl of Leinster), by whom he had four sons and two daughters.

The quarterings used by Peter Venables are as follows:

1. *Azure, two bars argent.* [Venables]
2. *Argent, three piles wavy issuant from a chief sable.* [Eccleston, Lancashire]
3. *Gules, three ostrich feathers erect argent.* [Griggs]
4. *Argent, a cross flory between four martlets gules.* [Golborne of Golborne]

<sup>16</sup> *Visitation Cheshire 1580* p.249.

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Figure 6: Venables impaling Cholmondeley.

5. *Vert, a wyvern argent.* [Moston, but called an augmentation in 1580]
6. *Argent, a bend between three pellets sable.* [Coton of Ridware, Staffs.]
7. *Azure, an eagle displayed argent.* [Ridware]
8. *Gules, three swords, argent, hilts and pommels or.* [Waldesheff]
9. *Or five eagles displayed sable, a canton ermine.* [Basing]
10. *Argent, three falcons close gules.* [Fawcon]
11. *Sable, three owls or.* [Thurcaston]
12. *Azure, two bars argent.* [Venables]

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The additional quarterings 8 to 11 must be ancestors of Coton of Ridware, as numbers 7, 8 and 10 are given as quarterings of Fitzherbert in the 1583 Visitation of Staffordshire, and this family was related to Venables in descent from Coton.<sup>17</sup>

The Cholmondeley quarterings are as follows:

1. *Gules, in chief two esquires' helmets or (argent) and in base a garb or.* [Cholmondeley]
2. *Argent, a fess gules, and in chief three martlets gules.* [Cheney]
3. *Gules, a chevron between three capons argent.* [Capenhurst]
4. *Quarterly, argent and gules, in the second and third a fret or.* [Dutton]
5. *Argent, on a bend sable three estoiles or.* [Thornton]
6. *Vert, a cross engrailed ermine.* [Kingsley]
7. *Or, a saltire sable.* [Helsby]
8. *Azure, a chevron between three garbs or (a crescent xx for difference)* [Hatton]
9. *Azure, an estoile of six points issuing from the horns of a crescent argent.* [Minshall]
10. *Azure, two bars argent, on a lozenge sable a lion's head erased or.* [Dorman]
11. *Azure, two bars argent, on a canton sable, a chevron argent charged with a griffin's head erased between two pheons (mullets) argent* [Hill of London]
12. *Argent, a greyhound statant (courant) sable.* [Holford]
13. *Argent, a chevron between three text Ts Sable.* [Toft]
14. *Argent, three bulls' heads caboshed sable.* [Bulkeley]
15. *Argent, a boar passant sable.*
16. *Argent, two bars gules.* [Mainwaring]
17. *Azure three garbs or.* Perhaps an error for Cholmondeley, as in number 1.

The first nine quarterings are as in the 1580 Visitation of Cheshire, excepting that quite different arms supplied for Cheney at number 2.<sup>18</sup> Frances Cholmondeley's mother was Mary, daughter and heiress of Christopher Holford, whose grandmother was Anne, heiress of Goerge Dorman by his wife Joan, sister of Sir Rowland Hill of Malpas, and thus it appears that quarterings 10 to 16 are her ancestors, although not ordered correctly.<sup>19</sup>

The large, central tablet ('G') records twenty-three marriages, spanning about four centuries, by showing the basic Venables coat impaled with that of allied families. These are mostly ancestral marriages, although some belong to cadets, and to second marriages of ancestors. Not all are in correct chronological sequence. The pedigree can be followed with reference to Ormerod.<sup>20</sup> Starting with a mid-thirteenth century marriage to a member of the Penninton family of Lancashire, it continues,

<sup>17</sup> H.Sydney Grazebrook, *The Visitation of Staffordshire made by Robert Glover, Somerset Herald AD 1583, Collections for a history of Staffordshire* vol 3 pt 2 (London 1883) p.72.

<sup>18</sup> *Visitation Cheshire 1580* p 63.

<sup>19</sup> Sir George J Armytage and John Paul Rylands, *Pedigrees made at the Visitation of Cheshire 1613*, Record Society (London 1909) p.62.

<sup>20</sup> Ormerod 2nd ed vol 3 pp 198–200.



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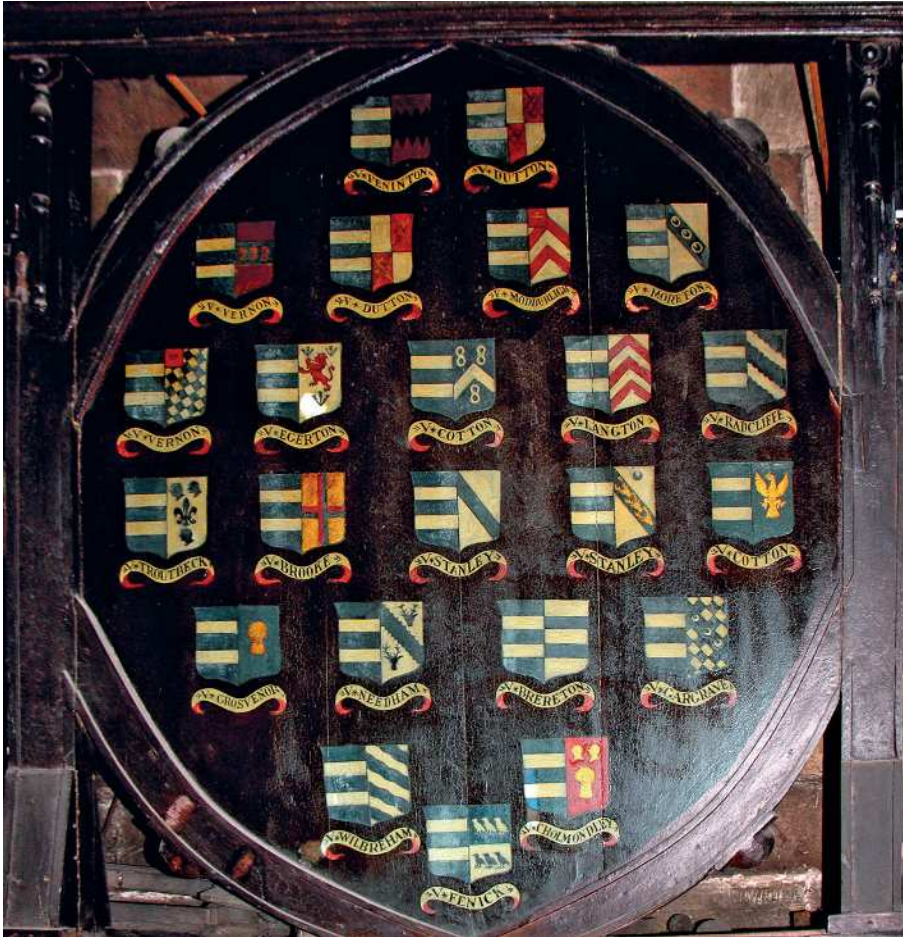


Figure 7: The Genealogical Panel.

generation by generation, until the marriage of Peter's eldest son, Thomas, to Grace, daughter of Sir John Fenwick of Wallington, Northumberland. As Thomas was born about 1625, it would seem his marriage had already been arranged. This main tablet is surmounted by a tablet with an inscription indicating that Peter Venables commissioned the screens and the date 1632.

The arms that appear are:

1. *Argent, a fess fusilly sable.* [Peninton (Pennington) of Lancashire]. This marriage of Sir Roger Venables and Alice Peninton was *c* 1240.
2. *Quarterly argent and gules, in the second and third a fret or.* [Dutton]. Marriage of Sir William II and Margaret Dutton, *c* 1260.
3. *Or, on a fess azure three garbs or.* [Vernon]. Sir Hugh II and Agatha Vernon *circa* 1295.



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4. *Quarterly, argent and gules, in the second and third a fret or.* [Dutton alias Warburton]. William III and his first wife Agnes Dutton, c 1310
5. *Argent, two chevrons gules, on a canton of the second, a cross crosslet fitchy argent.* [Mobberley]. Sir Hugh III and his first wife, Elizabeth Mobberley, c 1320.
6. *Argent, on a bend Sable three buckles of the first.* [Houghton]. Sir Hugh III's second wife, Katherine Houghton, c 1350
7. *Lozengy argent and sable (argent fretty sable), on a canton gules a crescent or for difference.* [Vernon]. William III's second wife, Maud Vernon, c 1340. For some reason a garbled version of the arms of the Vernons of Haddon, Derbyshire is given here, whereas it ought to be Vernon of Shipbrook, Cheshire, as above.
8. *Argent, a lion rampant gules, between three pheons sable.* [Egerton]. John Venables' marriage to Isabel Egerton, c 1340.
9. *Azure, a chevron between three cotton hanks azure.* [Cotton]. Hugh IV's first marriage to Margery Cotton, c 1365.
10. *Argent, three chevronels gules.* [Langton]. Sir Richard' marriage to Isabel Langton, circa 1385.
11. *Argent, two bendlets wavy sable.* [Ratcliffe]. Hugh V's marriage to Cecily Radclyf (Radcliffe), c 1405.
12. *Argent, a fleur-de-lys sable between three moors' heads proper.* [Troutbeck]. Sir Hugh VII and Elizabeth Troutbeck, c 1440.
13. *Or, a cross engrailed perparty gules and sable.* [Brooke]. Sir Hugh IV's marriage to Ellen Brooke, c 1370.
14. *Argent, on a bend azure, (three bucks' heads caboshed or)* [Stanley]. Thomas Venables marriage to Margery Stanley of Hooton, c 1435.
15. *Argent, on a bend azure, three bucks' heads caboshed or, with a crescent for difference.* [Stanley]. Thomas II's marriage to Cicely Stanley of Weever, c 1480.
16. *Azure, and eagle displayed argent.* [Cotton of Ridware]. William VI's second marriage to Elinor Cotton of Ridware, c 1510.
17. *Azure, a garb or.* [Grosvenor]. William VI's first marriage to Katherine Grosvenor, c 1530.
18. *Argent, a bend engrailed azure, between two bucks' heads Sable.* [Needham]. Thomas III's marriage to Maude Needham, c 1540.
19. *Argent, two bars, sable.* [Brereton]. Thomas IV's first marriage to Elizabeth Brereton in 1552/3.
20. *Lozengy, argent and sable, on a bend of the second, three crescents of the first.* [Gargrave]. Thomas IV's second marriage to Anne Gargrave on 15 July 1599.
21. *Bendy wavy argent and azure* [Wilbraham of Woodhey]. Peter's first marriage to Mary Wilbraham, c 1620.
22. *Gules, in chief two esquire's helmets argent, and in base a garb or.* [Cholmondeley]. Peter's second marriage to Frances Cholmondeley, c 1625
23. *Per fess, argent and gules, six martlets counter changed.* [Fenwick]. Thomas V's marriage to Grace Fenwick, c 1630.

### Conclusion

Each screen displayed the arms of the marriages of the father and son, Thomas and Peter Venables. When the screens were moved to the tower in the mid-19th century, it would seem that they were reduced in size to fit along the space available along the north and south walls. It is a pity that these heraldic, genealogical and historical treasures are currently hidden away in the base of the tower and only viewed by the curious visitor. They reflect the social habits and canons of a distant past; not only are they evidence of Peter Venables' vanity and pride in his family, but also his undoubted interest in the sciences of heraldry and genealogy.

If all goes to plan it will be pleasing to see the heraldic friezes placed in a prominent position in the body of the church, where they can be viewed by visitors from both sides. It has been agreed that re-painting in bold colours, gilded and silvered in the same way that many monuments in English parish churches have been treated, is not the best way forward. Instead, the colours will be left as they are, apart from cleaning. Sample cleaning has already indicated the vibrance of the paintwork that can be revealed. It is hoped that interpretation boards with illustrations will be provided. Thus, the Heraldic Screens of Middlewich will be a glorious reminder of a local family that had a significant place in Cheshire history and of a time when symbolism, in the form of heraldry, was so important.



*Figure 8: Crest on the Venables Screen.*



*Figure 9: Panel I, The Venables-Vernon Panel.*