John Harvey's Carved Mantlepiece (c.1570): an early instance of the use of Alciato emblems in England

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Reprinted from: Saffron Walden Historical Journal No 6 Autumn 2003

In 1855, Mr Robert Driver Thurgood, the owner of a substantial mansion in the centre of the town of Saffron Walden, Essex, decided to demolish the property and sell the land to provide additional space for the town's cattle market. Many old houses in the town were being demolished at the time, but the destruction of this particular house on Market Street
attracted more attention than was usual. The house had been the dwelling of John Harvey (d. 1593), yeoman farmer, master rope-maker, and father of the English renaissance scholar and poet Gabriel Harvey (c.1550-1650).

In the course of the demolition the removal of some oak wainscot panelling revealed three heavily carved chimney-pieces. The *Chelmsford Chronicle and Essex Herald* of June 1855 reported that the discovery of these long-hidden structures aroused an 'extraordinary interest amongst the gentry and curious of the town and neighbourhood, hundreds having been attracted by the antiquated nature of the Ornaments and fittings, which have been for ages obscured behinds the Wainscots, and it has afforded some rare opportunities for exercising the new fashionable photographic art.'

The trustees of Saffron Walden Museum expressed their concern about the fate of these relics, and Mr Thurgood partially atoned for his wanton destruction of the house by donating to the museum two of the chimney-pieces and a wooden window frame.

The chimney-piece which forms the subject of this study, is one of the earliest known instances of the reception of Alciato emblems in England. When it was discovered it had suffered extensive damage by having deep vertical sections cut out of the cornice to house the wooden studs to which the wainscotting was attached. This damage was made good early in 1856 by a Mr Henry Bell, who completed his restoration in ten days and fixed the chimney-piece in the vestibule of the museum where it still stands today. For his work he was paid £2.7s.0d.

The second chimney-piece, despite being accepted by the museum, was never exhibited. It has since inexplicably disappeared. The fate of the third chimney-piece has never been established. In all likelihood it was destroyed during the demolition work. Fortunately, the museum possesses photographs of both these missing items taken whilst they were in situ.

The Harvey mansion was situated between Market End Street (now Market Street) and Common Hill, and was in close proximity to the town house of the Elizabethan diplomat Sir Thomas Smyth of Hill Hall, Theydon Bois, Essex. Smyth, who may have been a kinsman of the Harveys, became the 'intellectual father' and a benefactor of Gabriel Harvey.

John Harvey possessed at least two other houses in Saffron Walden as well as extensive land holdings. One of his houses, which still stands in Gold Street (formerly Gowle Street), later became for many years the home of Gabriel Harvey on his return after the termination of his academic career.

John Harvey was born at an unknown date into a fairly wealthy family of yeoman farming stock. His mother Christian, widow of Richard Harvey, in
her will dated 1556 left several bequests to family, friends and the local poor, but bequeathed the bulk of her estate to her only daughter Elizabeth Stockbredge. To her only son John, her executor, she left only a feather bed and sundry household items. This suggests, since she was on good terms with him, and contemporary documents seem to confirm it, that John Harvey was already a wealthy man.

Harvey's prosperity was derived from farming, brewing, rents and rope-making. The manufacture of rope at this time was carried out at a rope-house, a building incorporating or having attached to it a flat stretch of ground 1000-1400 feet in length known as a rope-yard or rope-walk. Here the master roper and his assistants twisted hemp, jute or flax yarn into ropes and cordage. The precise location of Harvey's rope-walk is not known, but was probably within the 'extensive warehouse and premises' adjacent to his mansion house.3

One of the few existing references to his rope-making business appears in the Churchwarden's Accounts of Bishops Stortford parish church for 1579, it reads 'Paid to Harvie of Walden for a rope for the bell ijs. iijd.'4 The business and the mansion were at some subsequent date sold to the Thurgood family. The date of the transfer is unknown, but was presumably after the death of Harvey in 1593, or perhaps if his wife Ales (?) continued the business, after her death in 1613. The first reference to Thurgood as rope-maker occurs in the Churchwarden's Accounts of Saffron Walden parish church for 1623, 'Paid Thurgood for a bellrope iijs ij'.5

As befitted a prosperous provincial worthy, John Harvey was a prominent member of Walden Corporation, and from October 1572 until October 1573 'he bore the chiefest office (treasurer) in Walden with good credite'.6 His wife presented him with two daughters and four sons, Gabriel being the eldest. Ambitious for his sons, he sent them first to Walden Grammar School, then at the appropriate time he enrolled Gabriel, Richard and John as pensioners at Cambridge University. In filial gratitude, and not without a typically overweening estimate of his and his brothers' worth, Gabriel wrote subsequently of his father, that he 'hath maintained foure sonnes in Cambridge and elsewhere with great charge: all sufficiently able to answer for themselves; and three universally well reputed in both Universities and throughout the whole realm'.7 The 'great charge' was close to £1000, but despite this financial sacrifice for their education, the sons, grateful as they were, were ever conscious of their humble parentage. This sensitivity was exploited by their enemies Thomas Nashe (1567-1601) and Robert Greene (1558-1592) in the scurrilous pamphlet war between them. Nashe mockingly calls them the 'Hs of Hempe Hall'.8

John Harvey probably commissioned the chimney-pieces sometime after about 1570. A sketch made of his house just prior to its destruction shows a substantial mansion of late medieval type with several fine brick...
chimneys. With the gradual introduction of brick in the second half of the 16th century, many old houses were improved by the addition of double-backed fireplaces and chimneys. The period 1570-1640 is known as the time of the great rebuilding, and it seems that Harvey was an early contributor to the 'multitude of chimneys lately erected'. These chimneys were important innovations to the home, for apart from their primary function of removing smoke, they also facilitated the construction of upper chambers or 'sollars' within the hitherto unutilised roof space. These additional rooms, often with their own fireplaces, allowed the family to disperse their sleeping quarters about the house. This took pressure off the erstwhile over-used parlour, enabling the head of the household greater privacy in his use of this room. As the principal room of the house, the parlour became the place where the best furniture was displayed, and company was entertained.

Although we may safely assume that John Harvey commissioned the chimney-pieces, the question remains, who was responsible for their conception and design? In an age of increasing prosperity for the mercantile classes the demand for artistic embellishments with which to ostentatiously display their wealth was supplied by architect designers familiar with Continental applied art. Itinerant craftsmen with the skills to execute these designs were not lacking.

Harvey's 'Alciato' chimney-piece with its topical emblematic content and direct allusion to Harvey's rope-making business appears to be the product of a literary rather than an artistic mind. Virginia F. Stern, who wrote a thorough biography of John Harvey's son Gabriel Harvey, wonders whether Gabriel could have devised them. In spite of the lack of evidence to support it, it is hard to escape the conclusion that Gabriel Harvey or one of his brothers was responsible for its design.

Although very few chimney-pieces have survived, there are sufficient descriptions, architect's designs and observer's drawings, as well as actual chimney-pieces preserved in situ and in museums to enable us to describe the general tendencies. At the beginning of this century L.A. Shuffrey described the development of the chimney, the chimney-piece and its accessories from the earliest times to the beginning of the 19th century. His richly illustrated study, accompanied by 130 plates and many more illustrations, shows that during the period of great building activity in Tudor and Elizabethan England the chimney-piece became an important focus of the house, not only as the source of heating, but also as 'an object of display'. The jambs, mantle-beam or stone lintel, and often the space between the mantle-piece and the ceiling was frequently decorated with birds and animals, flowers and plants, allegorical figures and emblematic scenes, coats-of-arms and heraldic designs, mottoes and rebuses.
An obvious response of a wealthy man eager to display his learning and sophistication would have been the decoration of a chimney-piece with what the emblem-writer Geffrey Whitney described as 'some wittie devise expressed with cunning workmanship, something obscure to be perceived at the first whereby, when with further consideration it is understood it maie the greater delighte the behoulder'.

Shuffrey notes that the Tudor stone arch was replaced by the rectangular fireplace, which allowed for the kind of decoration that was to become very popular. John Harvey was evidently a modern man of his time, choosing such a rectangular shaped fireplace and embellishing the chimney-piece in the manner he did. Not being of aristocratic family, he had no opportunity to display his heraldic claims to eminence, and he therefore did what so many other successful merchant families did, which was to allude to their name or the reasons for their success through a visual motif or a combination of motto and picture in the tradition of the emblem.

A description survives of an oak beam in an old house in Kent which bears the words 'Wass Heil' and 'Drinc Heile'. These words frame a pictured wassail bowl that is inscribed with two hawks, evidently a rebus for the builders name was Henry Hawkes. The Dutch took a special pleasure in embellishing their fireplaces with mottoes expressing wise sayings, moral truths and also biblical scenes. Similar examples may be found in England.

Loseley in Surrey, built by Sir William Moore between 1562 and 1568, boasts a fine chimney-piece that resembles in many ways that of John Harvey. The space above the chimney-piece was incorporated into the chimney design, providing the opportunity for an exercise in self-advertisement or self-aggrandisement. In the centre stands a mulberry tree flanked to the far right and left by a coats-of-arms. The mulberry tree is a visual pun on the Latin form of family name More, which is Morus. This, incidentally, was the subject of one of Alciato's tree emblems. On either side of the mulberry tree may be read the words MORVS TARDE MORES [A fool (learns) good habits late] and to the right we read MORVUM CITO MORITVR [The mulberry dies young].

John Harvey's chimney-piece does not celebrate a family name, rather it makes a moral statement about the value of labour and effort. But by centring the scene of Ocnus the rope-maker John Harvey identifies his own entrepreneurial activity.

The use of epigrams and inscriptions as a form of interior decoration was common. Indeed, Puttenham observes that such an epigram 'is but an inscription of witting made as it were vpon a table or in a windowe, or vpon the wall or mantell of a chimney in some place of common resort, where it was allowed euer yman might come, or be sitting to chat and

prate, as now in our tauernes and common tabling houses, where many merry heades meete, and scribble with ynke with chalke, or with a cole such matters as they would every man should know, & descant vpon'. Puttenham is describing a practise of applying epigrammatic graffiti to the walls of public places, an activity that today is largely confined to university campuses and public toilets. The relation of emblem to epigram was, of course, well known and examples survive of emblematic epigrams carved into wooden tables.

Description of 'Alciato' Chimney-piece

The chimney-piece approximates in form to a rectangular classical arch, an entablature supported upon columns of side shafts. Its basic dimensions are as follows; 78.5 ins. in width, 77 ins. In height by 9 ins. in depth; the internal measurements of the hearth area are 72 ins. in width by 54 ins in height.

The chimney-piece is entirely constructed of clunch, a limestone forming the hard basal beds of the chalk formation. The ease with which this stone is carved made it a popular material for the construction of internal decorative features and dressings in ecclesiastical and secular buildings from the medieval period until about the middle of the 17th century in England. After restoration the chimney-piece was given a coat of self-coloured paint or limewash.

The moulded cornice which forms the mantelshelf was badly damaged at the time the chimney-piece was concealed behind oak wainscoting in the 17th or 18th century. Deep vertical sections were cut into the cornice for the reception of wooden studs to which the wainscot panels were secured. This damage could have been repaired by scarfing in blocks of clunch and cutting them back to match the existing moulding. Regrettably the restorer chose instead to cut back the whole cornice drastically and give the reduced surface a rock-faced rusticated finish quite out of harmony with the overall design.

In addition to repairing the cornice, the same Victorian restorer also made good damage to the illustrations beneath, and where he felt necessary, he emendated the accompanying mottoes. The modern viewer is thus presented with mottoes, which in fact combine remnants of the Elizabethan originals with Victorian emendations.

The Imagery

Beneath the cornice is a broad frieze 78.5 inches by 9.25 inches which is filled with bold relief carvings laid out in three sections, the identification and interpretation of which forms the basis of this study.
Beginning at the left, the imagery is as follows: a pack-laden hybrid animal with a horse-like body, short ears and cloven hooves devours a thistle (Cirsium). The apparently hybrid nature of the animal is almost certainly the result of the restorer giving it cloven hooves in the mistaken belief that it was intended to be a polled ox. The Alciato source clearly establishes the animal to be an ass. The entire contents of the pack-saddle have been cut away leaving a clean vertical surface upon which someone has scratched the initials W A with a V beneath; the style of the W formed of two conjoined V's indicates that this graffito was executed some time during the 16th to 18th centuries, perhaps by one of the workmen responsible for concealing the chimney-piece.

Above the ass's head is a goose-like bird perched in heraldic fashion upon a slipped and leafed branch with a five-petalled flower above it. Beneath and above the ass are five stylised flowering plants, four of which have defied identification, a fifth may be the Globe Thistle (Echinops). Above this section cut into the base of the bedmould, which forms the superior border of the frieze, is the motto ALIIS NON NOBIS [For others not for ourselves].

A flourishing tree laden with large dimpled fruits, perhaps oranges, serves to divide the ass motif from the second and largest section, which occupies the whole of the central area of the frieze. The theme of this section is rope-making.

Three short-haired, bearded men are engaged in twisting three strands of hemp or jute into a single rope. The men are dressed in late 16th century costume of winged and tabbed doublets or jerkins, breeches, stockings and latchet-secured shoes. The first man has spherical buttons decorating the front of his garment and he is wearing a round-crowned hat with twisted band and narrow upturned brim. His shoes are flat and heeless, whereas those of his two companions have incipient heels. He is seated upon a joined stool with a nulled frieze. When originally carved the stool had four legs, but the right front and back legs and the stretcher have been broken away. With both hands upon a vertical handle the man is steadying the strands where they pass through a thick vertical board fixed into the ground before him. This board is braced by a diagonal support.

The second roper is standing facing the first and is twisting the triple strands with a double-handed implement into a single thick rope. This man's face has sustained some damage.

The third roper, with his well defined features and less accurately rendered clothing, is the work of the restorer. He is also hatless and standing, and is keeping the tension on the newly twisted rope with the aid of a device known as a cart-jack. As the rope is spun this man's task is to move the cart-jack slowly forward as the rope thickens. The cart-jack consists of a near horizontal platform with a spoked wheel at its front. The
opposite end of the platform is held just clear of the ground by a short leg projecting from its underside just aft of the mid-pint. On top of the platform is a diagonally-braced vertical board, seen here in section, through which the rope is passed and secured.\textsuperscript{20} The inevitable sagging of the rope beneath its own weight is prevented by the provision of two uprights fixed in the ground below it.

Behind the third roper is an ass consuming the finished hanks of rope which lie on the ground before it. As in the first section much of the space above, below and between the men is occupied by a variety of elements of rurality. There are five unidentified flowering plants; a butterfly or moth in flight may be a silk moth, in which case, the ball of thread lying on the ground beneath is probably of silk. Above the rope is a small building with a gabled and hipped roof. Much of this structure has been crudely chiselled away and only a fragment of what appears to be a mullioned window remains. To the right of this building is a small flourishing oak tree with a pig beside it eating fallen acorns. Further again to the right is a field of corn out of which a sheep (?) is peering. Below the rope is a gallinaceous bird, perhaps a partridge, and close to the third roper is a sleeping dog. Above this section is the motto NEC ALIIS NEC NOBIS [Neither for others nor for ourselves].

The division between the second and third sections is occupied by a flourishing unidentified deciduous tree from the branches of which one bird has flown and another is about to follow; on a broken branch protruding from the trunk hangs a pair of gourds.

The third section is filled by a straw beehive upon a low table. A swarm of bees is flying about the hive and four are about to enter it. Above this section is the motto ALIIS ET NOBIS [For others and for ourselves]. Between this and the two previous mottoes the intervening space is decorated by a plant-based curvilinear motif, much of which appears to be the work of the Victorian restorer.

The inferior border beneath all three sections is inscribed with a single motto, which now reads NOSTRI PLACENTE VNT LABOR. However, the result of damage and subsequent restoration make interpretation difficult. Between NOSTRI and PLACENTE, which was damaged, there is a long empty space which could have contained a word; damage also immediately preceded the letters VNT, which theoretically could be emended to either SUNT or FERUNT. There was no significant damage between VNT and the final word LABOR, and consequently no emendation is required.

The motto makes no sense in its present form. Each earlier translation presupposes an emendation, which was not always provided.\textsuperscript{21} We suggest the following translation: 'Our cakes are our labour',\textsuperscript{22} i.e. our labour brings its own rewards.\textsuperscript{23}
The frieze is flanked by recessed panels contiguous with the supporting side shafts. In the right panel is a cockatrice and in the left a gryphon. Both animals are depicted in heraldic fashion, the cockatrice displayed, and the gryphon segreant (rampant); each stands upon a torse, the twisted ribbon traditionally associated with an heraldic crest.

The two supporting side-shafts carrying the entablature are flat in section and rise from projecting plinths with struck-moulded bases. They are identically decorated with simple strap-work ornament with floral paterae and trefoil terminals enclosing eight naturalistic leaf and fruit motifs tentatively identified from the top as follows: strawberry, hazel, hops cherry, pear, apple, vine, and blackberry. The jams and head of the hearth opening are finished with a heavy ovolo moulding terminating on the verticals at about the mid-point in stop-chamfers decorated with oak sprigs and acorns.

When the chimney-piece was discovered it had an internal surround angled in the usual fashion for heat radiation and decorated with Dutch tin-glazed tiles 'of very curious subjects'. The practice of adorning hearth surrounds with tiles originated in Holland in the first half of the 17th century, reaching England about 1630 with the importation of tiles from Delft and other centres. The bulk of these imports and later English imitations were of designs in blue and white. The tiles on the Harvey chimney-piece may have been manganese tiles, a type introduced in the 18th century. The photograph of the chimney-piece in situ shows two recognisable composite designs of a dog sitting on a checkered floor to the right of the hearth, and a cat similarly seated on the left. These designs have a close parallel in a barn tiled with manganese tiles at Bouwlust Farm, Bergambacht, Holland. The presence of manganese tiles indicates that the surround was tiled in this fashion up to a century and half after the construction of the chimney-piece.

The sources of the Harvey Chimney-piece

Alciato is clearly the source of the decorated panels, but which of the dozens of editions available by 1570 served as the source? The first edition published by George Steyner in Augsburg in 1531 contained only 98 woodcuts, Wechel’s 1534 edition 111 woodcuts, and Roville/Bonhomme's editions from 1548 onwards the full 211 emblems (discounting the omitted 'offensive' emblem, 'Adversus naturam peccantes' [Padua: Tozzi, 1621, no. 80]). It seems reasonable to assume that the designer of Harvey's chimney-piece had one rather than several editions of Alciato before him. Since the earliest and only editions up to 1570 that contain all three emblems are the Lyons editions published by Roville and Bonhomme from 1548 onwards, one of these must have served as source. We reproduce illustrations from the 1550 edition without thereby intending to imply that this was necessarily the source.
Since the mottoes do not derive from any Alciato texts, we must look elsewhere for their sources or traditions. Emma Marshall Denkinger, who was not aware that Alciato is the source of the pictorial motifs, observes that the mottoes are variations of SIC VOS NON VOBIS, an anaphoric verse form attributed to Virgil, which was well known to 16th-century Continental and English impresa writers. In The Arte of English Poesie (London, 1589) George Puttenham devotes a chapter to the epigram, where he recounts the anecdote concerning Virgil’s epigram. He quotes the complete version including the introductory hexameter:

_Hos ego versiculous feci tutit alter honores,  
Sic vos non vobis Fertis aratra boues  
Sic vos non vobis Vellera fertis oues  
Sic vos non vobis Mellificatis apes  
Sic vos non vobis Indificatis [=Nidificatis] aues (p45)_

[These verses I did write, (but) another has won the honour.  
Thus do you, (but) not for yourselves bear the ploughs, oh oxen  
Thus do you, (but) not for yourselves bear the fleeces, oh sheep  
Thus do you, (but) not for yourselves make honey, oh bees  
Thus do you, (but) not for yourselves build nests, oh birds]^{28}

The phrase SIC VOS NON VOBIS was thus contextually related, among other things, with bees and oxen, which by way of association might well have provided the point of convergence with the Alciato _picturae_.

The study and imitation of the Latin epigrams of Martial and Juvenal, (perhaps also this one by Virgil), as well as the neo-Latin epigrams of Erasmus and Alciato, was standard fare at the Elizabethan grammar school, where as T.W. Baldwin puts it 'the boys were learning to vary verse into other verse'.^{29} The curriculum at Saffron Walden Grammar School, which Gabriel Harvey attended, was modelled on those of Winchester and Eton.^{30} Indeed, in 1581 a certain G.H., whom Baldwin identifies as Gabriel Harvey,^{31} published a full list of school texts, which includes Virgil, the epigrammaticists and Alciato’s _Emblemata_.^{32} Harvey may well have been recalling his own experiences at Saffron Walden Grammar School.

Denkinger also argues for Gabriel Harvey’s authorship, suggesting that he ‘had in all probability made the acquaintance of Vergil’s anaphoric verses at the Grammar School at Saffron Walden’ (p157). Since Alciato’s emblem book was used in Elizabethan schools, and G.H. includes it in his list of texts, it is highly probable that Gabriel Harvey is the author, and that he made the connection between the Alciato emblems and the variation of the Virgilian pattern. However, in our view the re-interpretation of the Ocnus emblem requires a level of sophistication that can hardly be expected of a ten-year-old, even one as precocious as Gabriel Harvey. Since there is no evidence to support the earlier dating of the fireplace to
1550-1560, a later date of 1570 is just as plausible. By this time Gabriel Harvey was already a learned young man.

**The Interpretation of the 'Alciato' Chimney-piece**

It is axiomatic that emblematic decoration - no matter what the medium – is significant decoration, that is, the pictorial motif is not just visual embellishment, it says something. It makes a statement that is meant to be read, de-coded, translated into conceptual language. Although the meanings associated with emblematic motifs derive from a variety of inherited traditions, taken together they make up a symbolic language that was expressed through word or visual image or through the interplay of both word and image, at which point the fully developed art form of the emblem is reached. Regarding the sum of emblematic motifs as an emblematic language does not, of course, imply that anyone writer or artist, reader or observer was conversant with all the possible uses and meanings of an emblem, any more than we would assume one speaker of English his conversant with all words and idioms that make up the English language.

Emblematic motifs, like the lexical unit of the word, were capable of carrying different, at times divergent, even contradictory meanings. Thus the snake, for instance, could denote wisdom, healing, eternity, but also slander, treachery, evil and death. The ass, so important in the emblematic programme of this chimney-piece, could denote stupidity, laziness, even sloth as a deadly sin, and avarice, but also humility. These meanings almost invariably derive from one characteristic, or quality of the thing or creature, or from an action associated with it. This single aspect provides the signification for the species or group. As God's 'second book', the whole of the created universe was regarded as containing objects and creatures that were meant to be 'read' for the inherent meanings they embodied; but they could be read both *in bonam partem* and *in malam partem*. The fact that emblematic motifs point to a variety of meanings beyond themselves does raise problems of interpretation. One wonders exactly what John Harvey's friends and visitors thought as they stared at the mantelpiece with its Latin mottoes, visual scenes and isolated picture motifs. Harvey's contemporaries would certainly have discussed the meaning of the panels over a glass of sack as they warmed themselves in front of the fire.

Emblematic motifs are, then, not necessarily simple or univalent, nor are the emblems in emblem books coins that pass from one author to another author or artist. They are not always quotations, or allusions to a fixed signification. Identifying Alciato as the source of the panels on the Harvey chimney-piece does not provide a simple explanation of their meaning. Indeed, it will soon become evident that the chimney-piece makes a series of verbal-visual statements that are totally different from those conveyed

by the Italian's emblem book. What we are witnessing is the creative re-
interpretation of emblematic materials.

If emblematic motifs may embody a plurality of pre-existent meanings, which in transmission can be varied and re-interpreted, which meanings are 'correct' in a given work? What kind of evidence is necessary to support a particular reading? It is not sufficient to argue that the relevant reading is the right reading, because that begs the question: What establishes relevance? In our view 'relevance' is established by the immediate context; this is where one must look for the signals, verbal and/or visual, that provide a clue to meaning, and suggest a direction for interpretation.

In the case of the Harvey fireplace, it is the Latin mottoes that provide the verbal signals, establishing the context within which the scenes and motifs convey meaning. This is demonstrable in the case of the three panels, since three mottoes stand immediately above the scenes to which they refer. But it is less easy to prove that a similar relationship exists between these three mottoes, or the single motto 'NOSTRI [=NOSTRAE[PLACENT[A]E [S]VNT LABOR' and the individual motifs scattered across the chimney-piece. Strictly speaking, it cannot be proven that each isolated element, as distinct from the three scenes, is emblematic, i.e. is conceptually significant. We have even had difficulty identifying some of these isolated elements, e.g. the flowers, and the absence of certainty in matters of identification makes interpretation impossible.

The wider context of the emblematic panels is the 'context' of John Harvey himself, his attitudes, civic involvements, and entrepreneurial activities. As in the interpretation of the impresa, where the bearer and occasion often supply a key to unlocking meaning, so too here the activities of John Harvey, rope-maker and civic worthy, are reflected in the design.

Turning to the three scenes that comprise this illustrated chimney-piece, the panel at the left shows a laden ass eating thistles with the motto ALIIS NON NOBIS, which is clearly derived from Alciato's emblem 93, although it has a completely different meaning in the emblem book. The original motto 'In avaros' [On misers] was evidently considered inappropriate for obvious reasons, and consequently a new motto was coined to accompany Alciato's picture. This is one more indication that existing emblems could be re-interpreted in much the same way that emblematic motifs themselves allowed of varying interpretations and applications.

Although no longer visible because of the damage to the surface, the pack-saddle or saddle bags must originally have contained goods, in all likelihood an assortment of foodstuffs that were not intended for the ass, but literally for others. The illustrations to these Alciato emblems usually show loaves of bread, a hare, a chicken on a spit, and closed packs, even a chest. The meaning attached to this emblem picture is anything but
capricious, it is related to the proverb: 'The ass loaded with gold still eats thistles'.

Above the head of the ass stands a goose or goose-like bird perched on a single branch. If the motto ALIIS NON NOBIS was intended to establish the theme and point the moral of all the images in this left-hand section, then we could perhaps interpret this image as implying that the domestic goose exists for man's use rather than for its own sake. There is nothing in Alciato, however, which would supply such a received meaning, and the image may be purely decorative: even in emblem books, not every visual motif is necessarily symbolically significant.

This panel is set of from the next by a fruit-bearing citrus tree, which may be thought of as completing the theme conveyed visually by ass and bird and expressed in the motto. The tree provides fruit not for itself, i.e. for its own consumption, but for others to eat and enjoy. It may thus be regarded as restating the dominant theme of ALIIS NON NOBIS.

The second and dominant panel features rope-making. Since John Harvey was a farmer who made much of his wealth from rope-making, it was natural that this motif should have pride of place on his chimney-piece. This scene, with its three workers weaving rope, an ass consuming the product of their labour, was taken from Alciato's emblem no. 99. But here, too, the interpretation has been radically changed. It is even more understandable that the patron, or his artist, should have rejected Alciato's original motto 'Ocni effigies, de iis quit meretricibus donant, quod in bonos usus verti debeat' [A picture of Ocnus; on those who give to harlots what should be turned to better use]. In place of a warning against wasting money on harlots, or spendthrift wives, which is the message of Alciato's epigram, the Englishman inscribed a new, somewhat riddling motto NEC ALIIIS NEC NOBIS [Neither for others nor ourselves]. The wording is clear enough but how it applies to the rope-making scene is not clear if one does not recognise the emblematic source. Thus Virginia Stern, guided by her interpretation of the motto NOSTRI PLACENTE[S] SUNT LABOR[ES] as 'Our labours are pleasing', implies that NEC ALIIS NON NOBIS refers obliquely to the use of rope for hanging: 'At least one of the products of the halter-makers brings no joy either to others or themselves' (p6). She observes that if Gabriel Harvey devised the motto, then he was in part 'responsible for the association of rope-maker and hangman which Greene and Nashe were later to harp on so devastatingly' (p6). The matter is, however, much simpler. The motto only makes sense when one recognises that the ass is eating the hanks of rope laboriously produced by Ocnus and his two assistants. The rope is thus destined neither for Ocnus nor his clients.

This panel is separated from the next by a tree of uncertain type, but apparently deciduous; it bears no fruit and even the birds appear to be
leaving it. It could thus be regarded as underscoring the notion encapsulated in the motto NEC ALIIIS NEC NOBIS.

The final panel features a large bee-hive with bees entering and flying in various directions around it. In the source emblem book this motif embodies the notion of the mercy of the ruler, or in the words of Alciato's motto 'Principis clementia'. In the entrance to Alciato's beehive stands the 'king' (rex) of the bees who never stings although he is twice as large as the others. In Harvey's fireplace there is no king bee, and the interpretation of the honey-making activity of bees is rendered as ALIIS ET NOBIS [For others and ourselves]. Perhaps it is not coincidental that the key word of the motto that runs across the mantle-piece beneath the pictures is LABOR. In a very real sense the productive labour of the bees is for themselves and for others. Doubtless, John Harvey would have seen his own financial success and civic service as a demonstration of the moral implied in the activity of the bees.

The Alciato panels are flanked by a gryphon and cockatrice. What do they contribute to the meaning of the chimney-piece? They may be heraldic in style, but John Harvey did not have a grant of arms, and consequently they have no definite heraldic meaning. Their purpose is thus a matter of speculation.

The gryphon, compounded of eagle and lion, can be regarded as signifying valour, and as such is a popular heraldic charge. It also has 'the properties of a Guardian ... the ears implying attention, the wings celerity of execution, the Lion-like shape courage and audacity, the hooked bill reservance and tenacity'. With these properties it makes a worthy addition to the chimney-piece, perhaps suggesting something of John Harvey's role as 'guardian' of his family, a responsibility that extended to town and borough.

The cockatrice is in origin the same creature as the basilisk, which as its Greek name implies means a king. Bartholomaeus Anglicanus (ca. 1230) confirms its genesis:

The cocatrice hatte basiliscus in grewe [Greek] and regulus in latyne and hath that name regulus of "a litle kyng" for he is kynge of serpentes, and they beth afered and fleeth whan they seeth hym. For he sleeth hem with his smyl [smell] and with his breth and sleeth also alle thing that hath lyf with brethe and with sight.

Despite its malevolent reputation the cockatrice is occasionally seen as an heraldic charge or crest. John Harvey's choice of a cockatrice to complement his gryphons probably owes more to a local tradition than to any symbolical meaning. According to a pamphlet of 1669 a cockatrice once plagued Saffron Walden. This creature killed so many of the citizens that 'the Town became almost depopulated, when a valorous Knight making him a Coat of Christal Glass, boldly went to assailt this Cockatrice,

but her venemous Nature not able to indure the purity of that fine mettle, she suddenly dyed, in memory whereof his Sword was hung up in Walden church, the effigies of the Cockatrice set up in brass, and a Table hanged close by, wherein was continued all the story of the adventure.\(^{36}\)

The pamphlet was written a century or so after Harvey's chimney-piece was constructed, but it may well have been recounting an old local tradition. The way the cockatrice was defeated by a knight in crystal armour is a story common to many parts of England.

**Conclusion**

As we have seen, each of the Alciato emblem pictures is given a new moralising motto, which, taken together, form a series of related statements on the value of labour. The three scenes are also linked by this idea of labour, which they hold in common: the ass labours by carrying; Ocnus works as a rope spinner; the bees produce honey. From left to right, we are presented with three statements that move from a negative to a final positive utterance. Firstly, ALIIS NON NOBIS [For others not for ourselves] is exemplified by the ass, which though laden with foodstuffs, can only eat thistles. A Marxist critic would doubtless find something of interest here, since the emblem could be read as critical of the exploitation of those who bear the burden of production without benefiting from the results of their labours. But this is doubtless not what the Tudor entrepreneur, farmer and rope maker had in mind. Much closer to John Harvey's heart would probably have been the sentiment that only a fool, best symbolised by the silly ass, works for others alone. Next comes NEC ALIIS NEC NOBIS [Neither for others nor for ourselves] which shows the work of the rope-maker destroyed by the ass. Here the animal stands not for foolishness but destruction. The implication would seem to be that the results of entrepreneurial effort and productive labour can be ruined by accident, malice or greed. Finally and positively, ALIIS ET NOBIS [For others and for ourselves] is illustrated by bees leaving and returning to their beehive. The product of their labours honey, is of value for themselves and others. And this would have been regarded as the moral justification for economic enterprise.

The motto, which literally underlines the three panels and may be thought of as summing up the meaning of the whole emblematic fireplace, NOSTRI [= NOSTRAE] PLACENT[A]E (S)VNT LABOR, permits a moral-cum-economic interpretation. The moral reading, 'Our cakes are our labour' or our labour brings its own rewards, accords easily with the three upper mottoes.

While Alciato is the source for the dominant emblematic motifs on the Harvey chimney-piece, they convey quite different meanings in Italian's emblem book. Alciato's laden ass eating thistles connotes greed, the Ocnus scene warns against the economic dangers of whoring, and beehive
stands for the clemency of the prince. But there is nothing capricious about this English re-interpretation. Whoever designed the chimney-piece re-interpreted the Alciato emblems within the spectrum of possible meanings established by tradition for each of the dominant motifs. The educated contemporary visitor to Harvey's house would have had little difficulty in 'reading' the meaning of the emblematic panels as he warmed himself before the fire.

John Harvey was unlikely to have known that Andrea Alciato, the source of the decorations for his chimney-piece, possessed a similarly decorated fireplace in his house in Pavia, where on 1 November 1533, he took up residence accepting a professorship at the urging of Francesco Sforza who had recently restored to the Duchy of Milan by Emperor Charles V. Quoting contemporary sources, Henry Green reports that 'For his chamber in his own house at Pavia he set up his family arms, and the answer in Greek which Alexander the Great is said to have returned to one who wishes to know the chief element in his prosperous fortune ΜΗΑΕΝ ΑΝΑΒΑΛΛΟΜΕΝΟΣ [By never procrastinating]. Alciato had chosen that motto for his own emblem, or impresa, which featured the elk, a punning reference to his surname. In this form the emblem is also encountered in his book of emblems, where in many editions it takes pride of place following two introductory emblems dedicated to the Duke of Milan and the Duchy of Milan. In setting up his family arms, which were the elk, as we also read in Alciato's epigram, and the motto, the Italian humanist and jurist had in effect emblazoned his chimney-piece with his own emblem. John Harvey would do something similar about 40 years later, although whereas Alciato's chimney decoration was a simple impresa Harvey's emblematic panels are a complicated syntagma.

Notes

See also John Franklin Leisher's Geoffrey Whitney's 'Choice of Emblemes' and its relation to the Emblematic Vogue in Tudor England (New York, 1987), which is the author's doctoral dissertation (Harvard, 1952). Leisher was evidently the first person to observe that the carvings derive from Alciato (p300). Quoting earlier sources Leisher dates the chimney-piece to the years 1550-1560, speculates that John Harvey himself chose the devices and mottoes (pp 302-3), which he reads as applying to the Harvey family, in part ironically. Independently of Leisher, we came to the same conclusions regarding the source of the panels, but we interpret them somewhat differently. Also since we have found no argument to support such an early date for the chimney-piece, and there is no evidence that John Harvey had the necessary knowledge of classical and neo-Latin traditions to have chosen the motifs and penned the new Latin mottoes, Gabriel Harvey can once again be regarded as the likely inventor of the design.

5. Goddard, p.22.
13. Shuffrey, p.75.
18. Earlier descriptions of the chimney-piece were not always accurate. Stern does not recognise that the illustrations are emblematic, and unaware that Alciato was the source, she was unable to verify her descriptions against the original source emblem. This led to minor but significant failures of identification and some doubtful interpretations. For instance, the animal in the first panel is an ass, not a pack-ox as Stern asserts, quoting Goddard, p.6.
19. These heels, which might otherwise date the carving to some time after 1590, are clearly the work of the Victorian restorer.
20. In some of the cuts of Alciato’s Ocnus emblem the rope-makers are not using a cart-jack. In those that do utilise this device, the platform is weighted down with a large rock. See for example Steyner’s 1531 ed, A8’ and Wechel’s eds. of 1534, no. 21 and 1542, no. 17.
21. The Saffron Walden Museum register of 1856 translates the motto as ‘Our honeycakes are labour, i.e. sweet is the bread produced by labour’; Goddard as ‘Our cakes are (or come from) toil’; Stern emends the motto as NOSTRI PLACENT[E] [S]UNT LABOR[ES], which she translates as ‘Our labours are pleasing’ (p.6).
22. This translation is based on the following emendations, provided by Paola Valeri-Tomaszuk of McGill University: NOSTRI = NOSTRA[A]E (adj fem. nom. pl): our PLACENT[A]E (noun, fem. nom, pl.): cakes VNT = SUNT: are LABOR (noun, masc. nom. sg. predicate to subject placenta [cakes or offerings]): labour, toil.
23. There is a further possible interpretation, which we consider unlikely, deriving from a different meaning and use of PLACENT[E]. In the Vulgate Bible, it can mean ‘offerings to God’, as in Jeremiah 7.18 ‘ut faciant placentas reginae caeili et libent diis alienis’ [to make cakes for the Queen of Heaven and pour libations to alien gods]. The only other biblical occurrence of this word is also in Jeremiah 44, 19 in a similar context. If placenta had appeared more frequently, and also in the New Testament, literally or metaphorically, then there would have been more justification for suggesting a religious interpretation to Harvey’s fireplace motto. Also had Harvey been a staunch Calvinist, then such a religious interpretation would appear more plausible, since success in the world, and the accumulation of wealth could be regarded as a sign of election. But that is not the case, and consequently this religious reading of work as an offering to God, appears forced.
28. Albert Schachter, who supplied the translation, notes that Puttenham’s arrangement of the lines does not accord with that in the *Anthologia Latina* 1, 12 (Leipzig, 1894), p.212, no. 257, where lines 1 and 4 are reversed. Giovanni Battista Egnazio’s edition (Venice, 1507) also records the arrangement of the *Anthologia Latina*.
37. Green, H. *Andrea Alciati and His Book of Emblems* (London, 1872), Preface sig. v-vi, see also pp 311, 294.

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