



The Hawstead Hatchments from Left to Right

1. **FRANCES Jane Metcalfe, died 1830 aged 36.** Frances was the first wife of Henry Metcalfe of Hawstead House (his hatchment is no. 4). On the shield, his 'arms' are on the left and the background is white, indicating that he is still alive. This contrasts with the right side of the hatchment (his wife's side) which is black. The coat of arms on her side is that of her ancestral family which is Whish. NB "Resurgam" = "I shall arise again".
2. **SOPHIA Metcalfe, died 1855 aged 66 OR ELLEN Frances Metcalfe, died 1858, aged 70.** It is unclear which of these two unmarried sisters of Henry Metcalfe this hatchment commemorates. The absence of the heraldic shield and helmet and the presence of a ribbon at the top, together with the completely black background, indicate that this hatchment is for a deceased spinster.
3. **FRANCIS Hammond, died 1727, aged 38.** This is the oldest hatchment, and the only one not commemorating a member of the Metcalfe family. The Hammonds lived at "Hammonds" in Bull Lane, Pinford End (a hamlet within Hawstead). Francis was married to Honor Asty and hence his coat of arms, including the birds and a chevron with scallops, is on the left with the Asty arms, two falcons and a diagonal stripe of ermine on a red background, to the right. The fact that the background is completely black indicates that the hatchment was made in 1758 after she died. NB "Mors janum vitae" = "Death is the doorway to life".
4. **HENRY Metcalfe, died 1849, aged 59.** Henry was married twice (first wife = Frances, see no. 1). What we see is a central shield with the Metcalfe arms (ie the three calves) with a smaller shield to left and right. These represent his two marriages: on the left, to Frances (right side, black = she is dead) and on the right to his second wife who has survived him (right side, white = she is alive). We don't know her name as there appear to be no records and the arms (with the hand holding a battleaxe) haven't been identified.
5. **Emma Colville, nee Metcalfe, died 1840 aged 45.** Emma was another sister of Henry Metcalfe. She married Rev. Nathaniel Colville, rector of Great Livermere who, at the time of her death has survived her – shown by the white background on the left, along with the Colville arms, whilst the right side has the familiar Metcalfe arms and a black background.

Hatchments.....Hatchments..... Hatchments.....Hatchments..... Hatchments.....Hatchments..... Hatchments.....Hatchments....

Look up and straight ahead and you can't miss seeing five large diamond (or 'lozenge')-shaped paintings with various heraldic symbols (shields with coats of arms, helmets etc) and a bit of Latin text. These decorations are called "hatchments" and they can be seen in some churches across the breadth of England. The ones you can see here are paintings on canvas with wooden frames. They had hung for many decades in the bell-tower, but have recently been repaired and conserved professionally. They were re-erected on the Chancel wall in 2010 and the cost of the whole project was in excess of £10,000. The oldest hatchment is the one in the middle, belonging to one Francis Hammond. All the others commemorate members of the Metcalfe family and date from the middle of the 19th century. The Metcalfes were the predominant landowning family at the time and are remembered today in the village by the almshouses, established by Philip Metcalfe in 1811 and the village pub, the "Metcalfe Arms".

The word 'hatchment' is a corruption of 'achievement' and in heraldic language this refers to 'the complete display of armorial bearings'. Physically it is a 'mourning board', carried in a funeral procession and then either displayed in the church or taken back to the person's house for display over the main entrance for a period of mourning prior to returning to the church. Because of the heraldic association the use of hatchments naturally tends to have been confined to the nobility and other well-off persons – ie those with family coats of arms and the associated trappings.

There are approximately 4500 hatchments in English churches. The earliest are from the early 17th century, but the use of hatchments was most popular during the late 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries – exactly the time of the five Hawstead hatchments. Whilst there are some exceptions – two churches in Shrewsbury have 20 and 21 respectively and at Stamford in Northamptonshire there's a church with 17 – it is normal for a church to have just one or two, if any. So our collection of five at All Saints Church, Hawstead is quite respectable!

From the background of the hatchment and the composition of the arms, it is possible to work out the sex and marital status of the deceased. For a single person (bachelor, spinster or widow(er)) the background is all black. Where no marriage has existed a shield (for a man) or a lozenge (for a woman) bearing the patrimonial arms is shown. In the case of a bachelor the helm and crest also appear. As the diamond-shaped lozenge is thought a somewhat plain shape, it is sometimes accompanied by a decorative bow.

Things become more complicated when a marriage has been made. When one of the couple survives, the background of the hatchment is divided vertically black and white, with black – the colour of mourning – behind the deceased's side of the arms and white behind the survivor's half. When a wife dies before her husband, her hatchment bears a shield with no helm or crest and the right-hand half of the background is black. If the husband dies first, the whole achievement is shown, with black behind the left half. If the hatchment is for a widower an all-black background is shown with shield and crest and marital coat of arms. If it is for a widow, the marital coat appears on a lozenge. These are the simplest cases and there are many hatchments whose composition taxes the onlooker and can prove hard to interpret: in the case of a man who has married several times, for instance, the arms of all his wives may appear, with separate backing for each marriage. See No. 4 over for an example of this.