

GO IN SCOTLAND IN 1823

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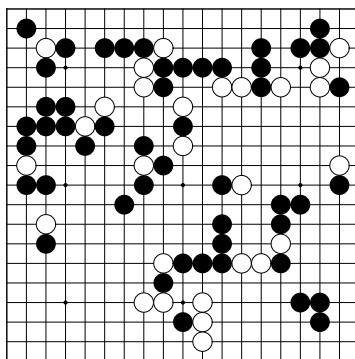
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In August 2013, whilst driving along the Borders Tourist route, we saw that the home of Sir Walter Scott¹, the novelist, had reopened after a significant refurbishment. Having tried unsuccessfully to gain admission for a couple of years, we went in and followed the advised route² through the house until we came to the Dining Room, decorated with hand-painted Chinese wallpaper. This was given as a present to Sir Walter Scott by his cousin Hugh Scott, who was a ship's captain with the East India Company. The archivist, with whose kind permission I have photographed the relevant paper, has only been able to identify its arrival in the year 1823.



Just to the left of the entrance door to the dining room is a painting of four figures, two of whom are drinking tea whilst two are playing Weiqi. The

diagram below sets out the board position, although the left lower side is obscured by the blue gown of the player's elbow.



The markings of the board (19 by 19) are interesting. There appears to be five star points, located at the centre and the 5-5 points, depicted by a group of four right-angles around each point. These must predate the later standardised markings (nb. the diagram above is drawn by software that assumes the standard markings).

I have contacted the Japanese, Chinese and Korean Go associations to enquire whether they either recognise the game being depicted or have any more information on this earlier five star point marking of the board³. The Victoria and Albert Museum has a curator who is researching Chinese hand-painted wallpaper and my initial contact with them resulted in the enquiry being answered by a Xiaoxin Li, a Weiqi player who played in tournaments up to the age of 16! I

¹www.scottsassbotsford.co.uk.

²*The Place I Have Created* – a short guide to Sir Walter Scott's Home at Abbotsford – published by The Abbotsford Trust, 2013

³I refer to 19 by 19 boards here – modern 13 by 13 boards have five star points.

understand that he was a member of the Durham Go Club for a short time.

The reply from Korea was that there is a ceramic tomb board of the later Han Dynasty c. 183 AD with five star points⁴, but it is a 17 x 17 board (whereas the Abbotsford one is 19 x 19); there is also a 17 star point board owned by Emperor Shomu (Emperor of Japan 724-749AD).

There is also a five star board which was regarded as highly unusual as it used depictions of floral stamens for the five star points centre, but additional half stamens on twelve further star points, (corresponding to the Emperor Shomu board). It is thought to have been produced in the early 1900s, but this one has a 19 x 19 grid.

In earlier articles in the British Go Journal it is noted that, apart from a single description of the game in a 17th century book written in Latin, no clear description of the game in Western literature appears much before the 1880s. The game is mentioned in the biography of Sir Harry Parkes⁵.

Sir Harry Parkes was a British diplomat born in Staffordshire who acted as plenipotentiary-extraordinary to the Meijin court in May 1865. His early career saw him living in China, where he was involved in both Opium Wars. He then was transferred to Japan by the Diplomatic Service, and is known to have learned the game in order to make social contact with ministers of the court, who were all keen Go players. Indeed he is recognised as having competed

at a Honinbo tournament in 1886, where he was apparently given a six-stone handicap. It is unclear who taught him the game, but he must have learned it whilst in the Far East, although he does not appear to have continued to play after returning to England, where he died in 1889.

The Scott archive has not as yet been fully documented and there is no evidence that the game as such was played in the house, nor do we know whether the significance of this single panel was appreciated when the paper was applied to the wall. The National Trust for Scotland has told me that there is one other property in Scotland with hand-painted Chinese wallpaper; it was hung in the Keir bedroom at Pollok House⁶ in Glasgow, circa 1898. The 19th century paper came from rolls found at Keir House near Bridge of Allan, Stirling when the contents of that house were sold in the 1960s. Although National Trust for Scotland manages Pollok House, the building is owned by Glasgow City Council and the collections are owned mainly by Glasgow Museums Service. The National Trust for England has also recently sent me a list of five properties, which I intend to visit in due course. I would be most intrigued to know if any members of the Association have seen such wallpaper, even if it does not include pictures of the game.

I must thank Matthew Withey, the Curator of the Scott Archive and the Board of Trustees of Abbotsford for their invaluable assistance and, in particular, permission to photograph the wallpaper in the Dining Room. □

⁴See english.baduk.or.kr/sub06_02.htm?menu=f16&divL=2.

⁵en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Smith_Parkes.

See also the article about him in BGJ 152, Summer 2010, www.britgo.org/bgj/bgj152.html.

⁶www.nts.org.uk/Property/Pollok-House.