



# NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2021

## Letter from the Editor

Hello – how are you? Are you vaccinated and raring to get back out into the world again?

What a great turnout for the AGM and our best Zoom turnout so far with 36 and two joining on the phone. An excellent talk from Harvey (look out for his article on the subject in London Archaeologist June edition), Harvey is also involved in a project to bring kiln 2 back to Highgate Wood, lookout for info in a future edition.

Further to Claire and Lee's inaugural Zoom in September they have very kindly serialised their talk with the first instalment below – *"Medieval Church Wall Paintings in Essex"*.

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# Medieval Wall paintings in Essex churches.

This is a version of the talk we gave to WEAG in September 2020. We have split the talk into three sections and over the next few editions of the newsletter will be looking at how the style of wall paintings developed over this period, the subjects of the images, how they were created, where in the church they were painted and how many were destroyed or lost and some later rediscovered. In this article we will focus on how the style of painting changed over the period and how this change was influenced by changes in church architecture, theology and economics.

Whenever people think of medieval wall paintings in Essex churches the first thing that comes to mind is Copford, or possibly the wonderful Doom painting at Waltham Abbey. However there are 20 plus churches in the county with substantial extant paintings from East Ham in the south east to Belcamp Walter on the Suffolk border.

Most medieval wall paintings that can be seen today were made between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. The tradition itself started only 200 years after the death of Christ when the walls of the catacombs under Rome were painted with Christian imagery. Early depictions were symbolic, for example a good shepherd or the Chi-ro symbol. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century with the adoption of Christianity as the state religion, more explicit portraits of Christ began to appear by the 5<sup>th</sup> century these had been joined by pictures from the Book of Genesis and the Gospel stories.

The earliest known example in Great Britain is from the 4<sup>th</sup> century house church at Lullingstone, in Kent. The original early tradition ceased when the Roman Empire left Britain in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century. Anglo Saxon wall paintings although well documented are exceeding rare and although Christianity was reintroduced with



Apostle in Great Easton Church

St Augustine's mission in 596 many of the best examples appear to have been

ransacked in Viking raids and only a small number of late Anglo Saxons buildings now survive often replaced by the vast rebuilding projects of the Normans. The only known surviving example from Essex is a small fragment of the Madonna and Child from the remains of the chapel outside Colchester Castle and now on display in the Castle Museum.



Saxon wall painting on display in Colchester

The next significant period for wall paintings is the Romanesque which reaches its peak in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This example from Little Easton church is typical of the period. These images show drapery arranged in a succession of mannered triangles and v folds which allowed hems to fall in lively patterns typical of the style. The byzantine influence proliferates at this time, where images are not realistic but expressive with Christ and the Apostles typically shown with eyes wide open and intensely staring pupils. This is one of the earliest wall paintings in Essex and shows a seated apostle, probably part of a series and dates from c.1130. Much skill has gone into the painting. The figure is massively solid but gracefully positioned in a seated position holding a large book. The head

which has traces of a halo is shown in profile and the arm reaching across the body suggests that there was once something else, perhaps a lectern or writing desk. The pose is sophisticated showing movement in the body. The strip of pigment above the head is likely to have been a scroll which at one time would have identified the figure. It is probably an apostle or evangelist rather than a prophet because the feet are bare, and this is reinforced by the fact that he is carrying a book and has a halo. Below the figure is a scene showing a man pruning a stylised tree likely to be part of the labours of the month's series.



Scenes from the life of St Catherine, Great Burstead

Around the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> c with the coming of gothic architecture the style of wall paintings began to change. Where previously small lancet windows had been used to light the interior of the church, allowing for large wall spaces, the new emphasis on light and height meant that large windows were inserted into existing walls and the canvas on which to paint became smaller and more irregular. Many artists responded to this change in church design by including a painted architectural framework around a series of paintings.

At this time small windows also began to be replaced by larger windows with stained glass, these meant that the story could now be told in the windows as well as on the walls. It is also at this time that the earlier majestic Christs are replaced with Christ in suffering, a human figure slumped on a cross.

The 13<sup>th</sup> and early 14<sup>th</sup> century was the most affluent period in Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire and similar levels of wealth would not be seen again until after the Industrial revolution. Another great influence on the development of wall painting art was the 1215 4<sup>th</sup> Lateran councils 21<sup>st</sup> decree that every citizen should confess their sins at least once a year to the parish priest under a seal of absolution and communion. This meant that all parishioners needed to have an active understanding of the church's moral code and that the clergy was responsible for them gaining this knowledge. Images of the passion of Christ multiplied as did pictures of the Virgin Mary whose cult became pervasive towards the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Most importantly the coherence of earlier schemes begins to falter and disintegrate, less wall space, competition from glass painters, repairs and alterations to buildings and changing devotional and artistic preferences of patrons and audiences alike combined to produce more episodic painting schemes. A good example of this is the passion scenes from Belchamp Walter, where Christ is portrayed four times in a single frieze. Similarly the scenes from the life of St Catherine from Great Burstead, which are believed to be the most extensive medieval wall paintings in South Essex, show a series of scenes



Passion scenes in Belchamp Walter



from the life of St Catherine who was popular in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, these paintings have been dated to 1310 to 1320.

Although the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century was blighted by famine, plague and revolt, wall paintings continued to evolve. The French style that had previously existed in courtly circles now spread to the provinces and this in turn was replaced by the more lavish Italian techniques and by the close of the century the blended traditions of France Italy, Germany and Bohemia coalesced and saw the emergence of the international gothic style with paintings becoming far more naturalistic and detailed with the modelling of hair and faces notably refined. The most visible impact of changing imagery was how the reminders of death, judgment and the afterlife were portrayed. Whereas earlier Romanesque schemes had shown Christ in majesty above the chancel arch, now the doom painting dropping with inevitability of death and judgement dominated the eastern end of the church. This new emphasis was stark, hope and salvation or hell and damnation. Complementary themes such as the painting of the Three Living and the Three Dead and separate scene of St Michael weighing souls hung in a balance, drove this point home. The three living and the three dead was a popular medieval story, whose exact origins are unknown. While there are variations between the text versions still extant, the tale is basically the same in all of them. In brief, one day three young noblemen, often shown as kings, were out hunting when they unexpectedly encountered three dead bodies. To the men's amazement and terror, the cadavers move and speak and there is confusion about whether they are hellish demons. In fact, the three dead warn their living counterparts of the transience of life and exhort the young men to live well as death may come at any time.



The Three Living, Belchamp Walter

In the 15th century England slowly recovered from the economic and social upheaval of the previous century and many established families, and the newly wealthy, flaunted their piety by building grand churches and personal chantry chapels. An example of 15th century work, is the magnificent doom painting at Waltham Abbey.

Doom paintings, showing scenes of judgment, were generally found over the chancel arch. Doom is the old English word for judgement and the doom painting depicts the last judgement of Christ and the division of souls into the saved and the damned. They were seen in conjunction with the rood screen, with the central figure of Christ on the cross representing redemption. Waltham Abbey however has no chancel arch and so the painting was placed in the south chapel, the town's people's funeral guild chapel. All such guilds were abolished by parliament in 1547 at which point a false ceiling was put in and the room used as a vestry and school. In 1870 the Education Act provided for free state schools in all towns and the one in Waltham Abbey opened in 1875 and so the chapel was then restored and rededicated as a Lady Chapel and the ceiling removed and the painting found in good condition. Over time it faded and it was restored in 1931 and 1968.

The central figure is of Christ in majesty wearing a red robe and seated on a rainbow. He holds up his hands to show the marks of the crucifixion, behind his head is the sword of judgement signifying death and on his right a lilly signifying salvation.

Around the figure of Christ are seven angels blowing trumpets, two on his left (hell), three on his right (heaven) and two at his feet. Those in hell have twisted trumpets. The letters R and S used to be visible near the two lower angels and it has been suggested that these stood for REX and Salvatore, Latin for King and Saviour.

On Christ's left are the living who are dressed in contemporary clothes, they represent all classes of society and are the souls awaiting judgment.



Waltham Abbey Doom Painting

At the bottom of the picture the dead can be seen rising from their graves. They are naked, although one wears the mitre of an Abbot or Bishop, their souls are to be weighed in the balances at the bottom of the image. This area is badly damaged because it situated on a filled in window, which has allowed the damp to creep in. St Michael the Archangel should be supervising the weighing but this figure has faded completely. On the other side of the scales a large red devil waits to claim the souls sent to damnation. They are bundled together like firewood and harried away by small red daemons.

The entrance of hell is shown as the mouth of the great sea-monster. A great red devil stands among the fangs and four scrolls are arranged around the monster, two can still be read with the words "invidie" (envy) and "lwste" (lust). A small pig like demon sits on the monsters head blowing a horn.

On Christs right hand side the blessed go with joy and praise towards heaven where they are greeted by St Peter holding the keys. They are led by an Abbot and a Bishop, possibly those of Waltham.

On the far left of the painting there are glimpses of heavenly Jerusalem behind St Peter can be seen the gates, towers and great high walls of the city. On the ledge is a kneeling Angel, one of the gate guardians mentioned in Revelations. Between the upper wall of the city and Christ are the souls of the company of heaven led by Mary and the Apostles, they all kneel in supplication for the souls to be judged.

In the 150 years prior to the reformation two thirds of England's parish churches were substantially rebuilt or significantly altered, many in the new perpendicular style which revelled in the additional light and larger windows. The grand scale of this building provided a new canvas for artist's to work on. The paintings of this period are more difficult to define simply by style alone, the delicate modelling of previous centuries has been supplanted by brighter colours and brush effects. Also 15thc depictions of St Christopher appear more muscular and descriptive, this can be seen in the



contrast between the earlier Little Tey depiction and the 15th century St Christopher at Layer Marney church.



St Christopher in Little Tey (above) and Layer Marney (right)

Style and techniques of the late 15th and early 16th century show the beginning of the transition from the art of the middle ages to that of the renaissance. It is impossible to know how this artistic revolution influenced the church walls of Essex as none have come down to us. The divorce of Henry VIII from his Queen Catherine of Aragon was, as we all know, the beginning of the reformation. In less than a lifetime the sumptuous images had been replaced with black letter

text, English church walls had changed forever as images were painted over and replaced with biblical text. The most common themes for text painted on church walls after the reformation were the Ten Commandments and Lord's Prayer. The examples from Fairstead show a bidding prayer for the protection of James I a verse from James "Go now ye rich men, weep and howl, for your miseries that shall come upon you". The text is enclosed in a border of interlaced foliage traces of which survive.



This article is largely focused on medieval wall paintings however the Victorian paintings at Foxearth are so extraordinary that we felt that they could not be left out. Firstly they do come some way to replicating the overall impression created by a medieval church and the fact that they were created at a time when many of Essex's best medieval wall paintings were being rediscovered and restored is by no means a coincidence. The paintings show a series of saints with their attributes (although in some cases these are missing or have been given to the wrong person!) arranged around the chancel, separated into female saints on the left and male

Black letter text in Fairstead Church



Victorian wall paintings in Foxearth

elements of Creation - air, earth, fire and water, with each element portrayed as an angel. The angels occupy a deep blue, star-filled sky. In contrast with the events in the heavens, Cazalet has added a frieze where the sky meets the earth depicting rural and urban scenes within the London Borough of Havering. Here are busy little scenes of Romford bursting with life and energy. Running through the scenes are greyhounds, as Romford is home to a famous racing stadium. In the distance are glimpses of London.

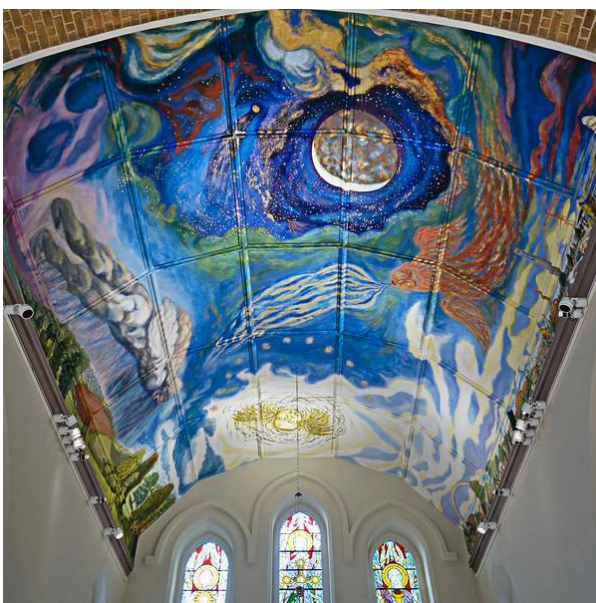
**Lee Joyce and Claire Hooper**

#### Bibliography:

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Curteis T, 1998. The uncovering and conservation of the medieval wall paintings at St James the Less, Little Tey: Essex Archaeology and History: Volume 29

Dean, D and Weltch, G et al 2017 A guide to the Abbey Church Waltham Abbey, the church of the Holy Cross and St Lawrence.



Modern painting in St Alban, Romford

saints on the right. A Christ in Majesty is painted over the chancel arch. Other notable Victorian examples are found at Little Braxted and Ardleigh.

A contemporary example of church painting can be found at St Albans in Romford. This was painted in 2005 by the renowned ecclesiastical artist Mark Cazalet who was commissioned to design and execute a mural on the ceiling of the Sanctuary and Chancel. The mural represents the four

Lodge, D. 2009. Short history and Guide to St John and St Giles church Great Easton (Church guide)

Pridgeon E, Researching medieval wall paintings: a guide to archival sources in England and Wales THE LOCAL HISTORIAN Volume 45 Number 1 January 2015

Rodwell W, 1998 Holy Trinity Church, Bradwell-juxta-Coggeshall: a survey of the fabric and appraisal of the Norman brickwork, Essex Archaeology and History: Volume 29

Rodwell W, 2012 The Archaeology of Churches

Rosewell, R 2011 Medieval Wall Paintings

Wright, A J. 1993 (revised 2003 ed. H Kleyn) St Michaels and All Angles, Copford.

Transactions of the Essex Archaeological and History Society 'New Series'

Transactions no 17, 1926– Wall-Paintings in Essex Churches. I. Wall-paintings formerly in the churches of Felsted and Great Chishall. Montague – Benton, Rev G.

18 part 2, 1926– Wall-paintings in Essex Churches. II: Wall-paintings in, or formerly in, East Hanningfield Church. Montague – Benton, Rev G.

20 pt 1, 1930– Wall-paintings in Essex Churches. III. Wall-paintings in Walter Belchamp [Belchamp Walter]. Montague – Benton, Rev G.

20 pt 2, 1931- Wall-paintings in Essex Churches. IV: Wall-paintings formerly in the Churches of Dovercourt and Hazeleigh. Montague – Benton, Rev G.

21 pt 1, 1933– Wall-paintings in Essex Churches. V: Copford Church and its Wall-paintings. E W Tristram and G Montagu Benton, M.A., F.S.A.

22 pt 1, 1936– Wall-paintings in Essex Churches. VI: Wall-paintings in the churches of Little Easton, Hadleigh and Wendons Ambo. E W Tristram and G Montagu Benton

22 pt 2, 1936- Wall-paintings in Essex Churches. VII: Wall-paintings in Fairstead Church. E W Tristram and G Montagu Benton,

23 pt 2, 1945- Wall-paintings in Essex Churches. VIII: Post-Reformation Inscriptions: the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and Sentences of Scripture. Montague – Benton, Rev G.

25 pt 1, 1955- Wall-paintings in Essex Churches. IX: A Wall-painting recently discovered in Lambourne Church. By E Clive Rouse, Essex Wall-paintings of St Christopher. By the Rev G M Benton

Notes on Fairstead Church (Church leaflet)

The medieval wall paintings at the church of St. James the less, Little Tey. (Church guide)

Fairstead Parochial church council. St Marys and St Peters church, Fairstead. A guide to the Chancel Arch wall paintings.

Notes on Fairstead Church (Church leaflet)

The medieval wall paintings at the church of St. James the less, Little Tey. (Church guide)

### **Display panels**

Great Burstead church

Colchester Castle Museum

### **Websites**

Wall Paintings Medieval Wall Paintings – Chronology \*  
<https://copfordchurch.org.uk/wall-paintings/>

Wall Painting Restorations \*  
<https://copfordchurch.org.uk/wall-painting-restoration/>

\*Adapted by Roland Mallinson (2005) from the guide by A J Wright (1993, revised 1998 and 2003)

St Peter & St Paul's Church, Foxearth, Essex  
<https://rakinglight.co.uk/uk/st-peter-st-pauls-church-foxearth-essex/>

Church of St Peter and St Paul A Grade II\* Listed Building in Foxearth, Essex <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101216708-church-of-st-peter-and-st-paul-foxearth#.YF-KFIX7Tcc>

St Alban Romford  
<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2006/1-december/books-arts/visual-arts/vision-of-glory-for-the-citizens-of-romford>

Cambridgeshire Churches, Bartlow, St Mary  
<http://www.druidic.org/camchurch/churches/bartlow.htm>

St Catherine's Gosfield BRIEF HISTORY The Building of the church  
<https://www.stcatherineschurchgosfield.org.uk/brief-history-of-gosfield/>

Essex views Essex churches Layer Marney  
<http://www.essexviews.uk/photos/Essex%20Churches/index.html>

Essex churches  
<https://www.essexchurches.info/>



# WEAG CALENDAR OF EVENTS

## Lecture Program

Talks will be accessible via the internet and NOT in person at the usual venue, further details to follow. We'd like your help in summarising each of the remote talks/lectures to be included in the following newsletter for those members who do not have internet access.

Lectures are in the committee room at Woodford County High School, High Road, Woodford Green, IG8 9LA at 7:15pm unless otherwise stated.

Non-members are welcome to attend Lectures. A voluntary contribution of £2 would be appreciated from guests.

**Monday 12 April 2021 @ 19:15**

'Historic Cultural Landscapes in South West Essex'.

*Speaker: Tricia Moxey.*

Although not born in Essex, Tricia has lived in the local area for 50 years spending much of the time learning about its fascinating history and how successive generations have left their imprints on the landscape.

**Monday 10 May 2021 @ 19:15**

The Rudge Lecture – 'to be announced'.

*Speaker: Mike "Mr Stonehenge" Parker Pearson.*

**Monday 8 June 2021 @ 19:15**

'To be confirmed'. *Speaker: Noral Carlin.*