



NEWSLETTER

JUNE 2021

Letter from the Editor

Hello – Summer has finally arrived and we are now able to get outside again – we'll be digging before we know it, things are looking positive for a dig later in the year.

Our new website is nearly ready for launch – check it out at www.weag.co.uk and while you're there have a good look around. It's still under construction but I think you will agree with me that so far, it's looking great! We have some publications for sale, so take a look at the **"Reports and Publications"** tab for current stocks.

Last month's Rudge Lecture by Mike Parker Pearson was well attended – after a hiccup at the start all ran smoothly. This month (Monday 7th June) we are staying local with a talk about the people who have owned **Copped Hall**. It is being presented by Norah Carlin, a long standing WEAG member who has written a soon to be published book on the subject. Norah studied history at St Anne's College Oxford and taught it at Enfield Tech, Middlesex Poly and Middlesex University all without changing jobs or moving from Edmonton. She first came to Copped Hall for a week's archaeology training in 2005 and joined the Documents group because I could read medieval Latin. In 2006 she moved back 'home' to Edinburgh but continued to research Old Copped Hall.

I've been away for a little break in Sussex with my partner Steve, and whilst walking across a field (on a footpath) Steve spotted this (I've taught him well 😊), what do you think it is?



Plus.....

Below we have Claire and Lee's final instalment on *"Medieval Church Wall Paintings in Essex"*. ENJOY!



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WEAG Message Board

2 years of *Current Archaeology* magazines available. Happy to deliver within local area. Please contact weagmembership@outlook.com and your interest will be passed on.

WEAG Member Profile

Would you like to be 'our profile on a member'? If so email me on and I'll forward you the questions.

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Anything you'd like to contribute to the WEAG Newsletter or if you have any comments on the new format, please email lexie.lyons@icloud.com

Medieval Wall Paintings in Essex Churches, Part 3

In this, the third part of our article on medieval wall paintings in Essex churches, we will look at how many of the paintings were lost or destroyed and how some were rediscovered.



**St Thomas of Canterbury
Hadleigh**

shrines pictures, paintings and all other monuments of feigned miracles, pilgrimages, idolatry and superstition so that they remain no memory of the same in wall or window glass". In keeping with protestant emphasis on the word of God black text writing, such as the Ten Commandments, were painted on church walls and royal coats of arms raised above the chancel arch. The short lived Counter

**Stoke by Clare Doom
painting reinstated under
Queen Mary I c.1550**

The wall paintings discussed here were not destroyed overnight. Like the reformation itself the process took over forty years and was fitful, uneven and even almost reversed at one point. The first paintings to be lost were incidental casualties of the dissolution of the minor monasteries in 1536 with the large monasteries being put down in 1539, our own Waltham Abbey, of course, being the very last to go. The next battle was directly ideological with 16th century church reformers disputing many traditional church beliefs and practices. Protestant reformers, such as the Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, placed increased emphasis on the word as found in the Bible, English versions of which were beginning to appear. Early biblical translator, William Tyndal described these images as "offenses to scripture" and Cranmer described paintings within churches as 'books for the unlearned'. In 1536 ten articles were proclaimed condemning images, followed two years later with further royal injunctions, outlawing, "candles, tapers and images of wax". A particularly vicious campaign in this year was launched against images of St Thomas a' Beckett, whom Henry VIII described as a traitor. Two years later Henry's soldiers destroyed his tomb at Canterbury. The accession of the nine year old Edward VI in 1547 and the appointment of the Duke of Somerset as protector led to more extreme Royal injunctions. The clergy were instructed to "take away, utterly extinct and destroy all



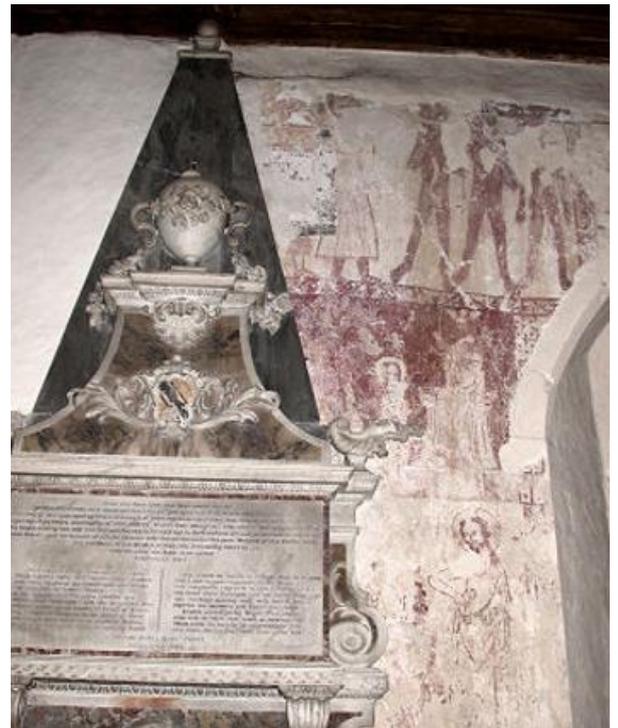


Reformation launched after Edwards's death by his Catholic half sister Mary I in 1553 was too brief to reverse the ravages of nearly two decades of destruction. Although a last judgement painting was reinstated at Stoke by Clare just over the Suffolk border. Mary's death after only five years on the throne quashed the revival of religious imagery before it could gain any lasting momentum. A good example of this is at Long Melford in Suffolk where in 1547 the wall paintings were whitewashed and painted with biblical texts and the kings arms. In 1555 these were erased when traditional religious paintings

St Christopher, Bartlow

were restored, these in turn were whitewashed over in 1562.

The whitewashing or in some cases hacking off of the plaster, continued into the Elizabethan Age. During the Commonwealth there was a new found impetus to destroy wall paintings. At Bartlow (then in Essex), Cromwell's men under the command of William Dowsing largely destroyed the paintings on 20th March 1644, recording in his diary ' We brake down a crucifix and a Holy Lamb and 10 superstitious pictures...' . By the 17th century, hidden under generations of paint most paintings were forgotten. This in turn led to more destruction as church walls were re-ordered to accommodate the fashion for large memorial tablets as can be seen in this example at Great Burstead. Paradoxically it was the restoration of the churches in the 19th century that led to both the discovery of most of the paintings we see today and conversely the destruction of a far larger number of others. The stripping of ancient plaster to reveal the ancient stone walls was common practise for many generations during the mid-19th



Great Burstead

century, even by societies as eminent as the Cambridge Camden Society. Others were destroyed simply because the ministers considered them too lewd or gruesome or even too Catholic. Not everyone was so indifferent or hostile, indeed antiquarians were stunned when superb paintings were swept away with haste without even allowing artists time to preserve them by copying. In 1877 this vandalism was one of the prime drivers that led William Morris to form the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings. Another of note was Charles Keyser who in 1883 published his monumental tome, (A list of buildings in Great Britain and Ireland having mural and other painted decoration). A volume that still remains invaluable to experts to this day. This destruction has continued until very recently and perhaps the worst case, unfortunately a local example, was in 1974 at All Saints Brightlingsea when wall paintings were discovered, the local parishioners attacked the paintings with electric sanders before the experts could arrive. In the same year at another Essex church the paintings at Great Wakering were lost when medieval wall plaster was removed without any regard. It was simply uncovering the paintings themselves probably caused the most damage, they were no longer protected from the elements by layers of lime wash. This was unfortunately compounded when the professor of Chemistry at the Royal Academy of Arts recommended the removal of any lime wash with ivory or bone spatulas and then applying a coat of



beeswax that had been mixed with lavender and orange peel oil. This was then mixed with varnish and turpentine and applied to the newly uncovered pictures. The results of this were disastrous as the wax attracted dirt and sealed moisture into the plaster beneath causing it to blister. Amongst the most contentious forms of preservation was repainting, although undoubtedly in some cases this has stopped the images from being lost entirely there are other instances including the 12th century scene in apse at Copford where the painting is so extensive it is essentially a Victorian reconstruction. The current practise in contrast is exceptionally restrained minimal intervention and conservation rather than restoration prevail. Paintings are stabilised and cleaned, flaking paint is carefully re-fixed, leaking walls are repaired and environmental conditions monitored. Wax or sealants are never used. Contrast the Victorian work at Copford with the modern more restrained work at Little Tey. Thankfully today there are now

numerous powerful organisations who make it their business to preserve these ancient works of art not least English Heritage, the Churches Conservation Trust and the Church of England itself. It is now rare for even a single year to pass without the discovery of one medieval wall painting and with modern techniques and the support of these bodies it is hoped that these images will be around for generations to come.

Up to this point we have been mainly talking about representational and narrative imagery. However painting in churches was also used for other purposes.

You would usually expect to find wall paintings inside churches however at Gosfield the painting is on the exterior. As you approach Gosfield Church through the lych gate, silver stars can be seen, painted on the walls and corner buttresses. They are the de Vere stars or mullets, symbols of the

Earls of Oxford. When the buttresses were rebuilt in 1560, the 16th Earl of Oxford has just paid for a new roof to the chancel and the stars reflect his patronage. When a church was first constructed, or significantly altered, it had to be consecrated by the local Bishop prior to worship taking place in the building. In essence, the structure had to be made into a sacred space. To do this the Bishop would bless the building and anoint it with holy oil, twelve times outside and twelve times inside. Each of the places that were anointed with oil would then be marked with a cross - known today as a 'consecration cross'. When originally created each of these crosses would have been painted, most usually in a red pigment, and surviving examples can be found in many churches. However, in most churches the pigment has now been lost, leaving only the setting-out lines of the crosses around the walls. They were usually created with compasses or dividers in the form of a simple cross as can be seen on the example on the left at Fairstead.



Lee Joyce & Claire Hooper

Selective Bibliography (for full Bibliography see first article in the series)

Rodwell. W with Rodwell K 1977 Historic churches a wasting asset. The Council for British Archaeology Research Report No 19

Cambridgeshire Churches Bartlow, St Mary
<http://www.druidic.org/camchurch/churches/bartlow.htm>
Accessed 17.5.21

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 7 June 2021 @ 19:15

'Old Copped Hall: Why a New History?'

Speaker: Norah Carlin.

Norah has written a soon to be published book on Copped Hall. Be one of the first to have a preview into the upcoming publication.