



NEWSLETTER

MAY 2021

Letter from the Editor

Hello – Did you enjoy last month’s lecture given by Tricia Moxey on Historic Cultural Landscapes in SW Essex? I certainly did and learnt a great deal including a new term ‘copparding’, I’ll also be going to look for the bogs in Epping Forest.

It’s the **Rudge lecture** this month, free and open to all attendees, this will again be by Zoom and we are very pleased to have Mike Parker-Pearson giving us a talk on **Stonehenge: Recent discoveries**. Please feel free to forward the newsletter or Zoom link to anyone who may wish to attend (*full details under “Calendar of Events”*).

Mike is Professor of British Later Prehistory at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London. He has worked on archaeological sites around the world in Denmark, Germany, Greece, Syria, the United States, Madagascar, Easter Island (Rapa Nui) and the Outer Hebrides. He has been UK Archaeologist of the Year and is a Fellow of the British Academy. He’s been directing research on Stonehenge since 2003. He has written several books and specialises in the study of the Neolithic British Isles, and the archaeology of death and burial, ‘the dead don’t bury themselves’.



(Photo courtesy of Facebook)

“Stonehenge: recent discoveries”, the lecture will cover –

Research in the last 15 years – and still on-going – is revolutionising our understanding of Stonehenge, its builders and how and why they built it. Teams of researchers have brought the latest technology to bear, as well as a lot of hard work, to address many of the questions that have mystified previous generations. This talk will look at some of the most intriguing discoveries including how the builders lived and where the stones came from, as well as exploring what Stonehenge might have been for.

Plus.....

Further to Claire and Lee's "*Medieval Church Wall Paintings in Essex*" article last month, please find below Part 2 of the trilogy.



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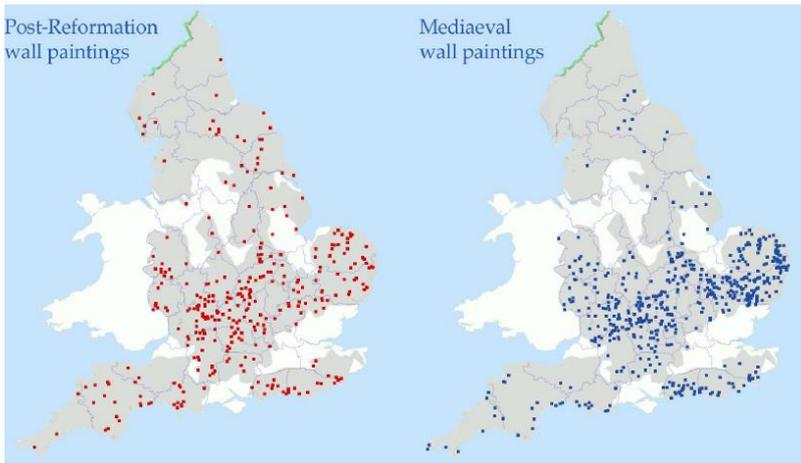
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Medieval Wall Paintings in Essex Churches, Part 2



In our last article we looked at how the paintings on the walls of Essex churches developed from the 11th to the 21st centuries. In this article we look at the subjects that medieval painters chose to depict and how and why they were placed in certain areas of the churches. The vast majority of both medieval and post reformation wall paintings are to be found in south and central England. The reasons for this are complex and would constitute an article in their own right.

As with architecture and practises in lay devotion the subjects shown on wall paintings

also evolved throughout the medieval period. Often more complex than the range of subjects was the repertoire within them and the way in which different images may be chosen, portrayed and arranged. Paintings could be used in different ways for different audiences and for similar yet different purposes. Images could be separated, amalgamated, shuffled, paired and juxtaposed. Painting schemes could be large or small, appear as cartoon like strips or in tiers, they could sometimes be conflated with more than one scene squeezed into one picture. Subjects were often painted in specific locations, for example paintings of St Christopher opposite doors, last suppers in refractories, resurrections above tombs and dooms on a chancel arch seen in conjunction with the rood screen. Inevitably evolution in architecture and size of buildings meant that the same subjects may be portrayed in different ways in different churches. In the same way some scenes can be remarkably similar. Also the subjects chosen and the popularity of each varied greatly between the 12th and 16th century. The wealthy patrons who paid for these also changed significantly during these 500 years as did the audience who used them. It is always important to remember that the patrons of the early Saxo-Norman paintings are as far removed from Henry and his Tudor court as that Tudor court is from us. There was never a shared canon of belief and artistic imagery set down as a model of how to paint a church, artists had a large repertoire of images from which to draw. This means that even when local artists were responsible for a group of churches subjects and sequences were rarely if ever identical.

Most wall painting subjects made between the late 11th and early 16th fall into one of nine categories. Of these nine subjects we have examples of eight different types still existing, or recorded by antiquarians, in Essex.



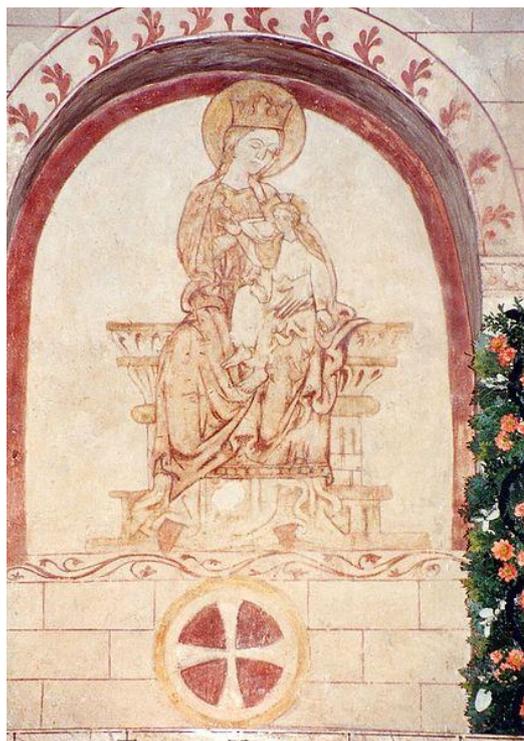
Category 1: Scenes from the Old Testament. Images telling the stories from the Old Testament are fairly rare in English churches. This example from Copford was painted c.1130. It shows the bottom part of an image of either David or Sampson and a lion.



Category 2: Devotional images of Christ

Images of Christ changed dramatically during the medieval period. The earlier images showed him as a supreme ruler of the universe while later images portrayed him with more humans suffering. A few images of the trinity can be found such as this one in Bradwell-juxta-Coggeshall. The Throne of Mercy depicts God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the one image. This image dates from the 14thC.

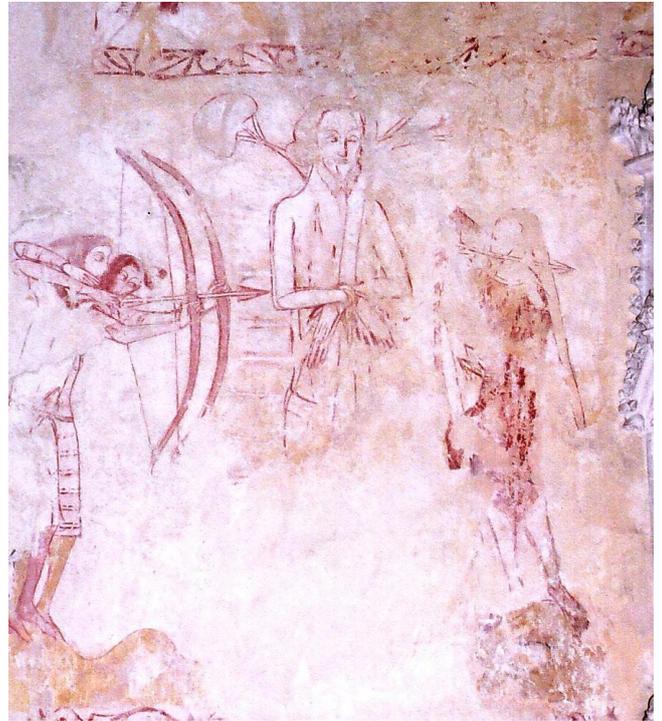
Category 3: The life of Christ. Most medieval images of the life of Christ showed either scenes from the nativity or the Passion (death). This example from Copford depicts the miracle of the Raising of Jarius' daughter, it was originally intended to be seen as part of the passion sequence rather than a depiction of a miracle in its own right.



Category 4: The life, death and miracles of the Virgin

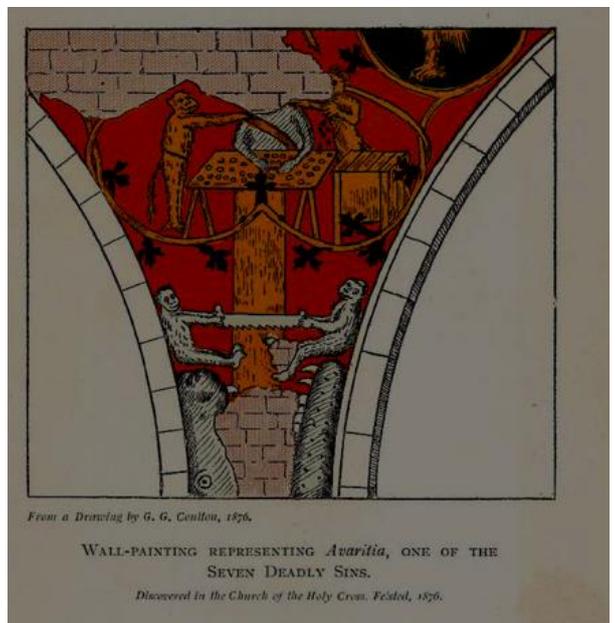
Images of Mary were very popular throughout the middle ages with stories taken from the gospels and apocrypha. This 13thC example of the Mother and Child is from Great Canfield and dominates the space behind the altar. From the 13th century onwards bishops had insisted that her image be maintained near the high altar.

Category 5: The saints and their lives: Increased prosperity in the 12th and 13th centuries saw a great proliferation in decorative images of the lives of the Saints. Local Bishops were free to proclaim their own saints leading to specific national saints such as the Anglo Saxon St Edmund. Most imaged of Saints show them with their attributes, mainly the instruments of their martyrdom and this image of St Edmund from Great Burstead shows the saint in the act of being martyred.



Category 6: Death and the last judgement. The church taught that everyone would face personal judgement and be held accountable for how they had lived their lives and paintings such as the Weighing of Souls, the Three Living and the Three Dead and Doom paintings, such as this 15th c example from Waltham Abbey, emphasized this point.

Category 7: Good v Evil. From the early 13th century lay people were expected to make an annual confession of their sins, and in order to do this they needed to know what constituted a sin in the eyes of the church. Although now lost this painting from Felstead depicted avarice and clearly showed its consequences.

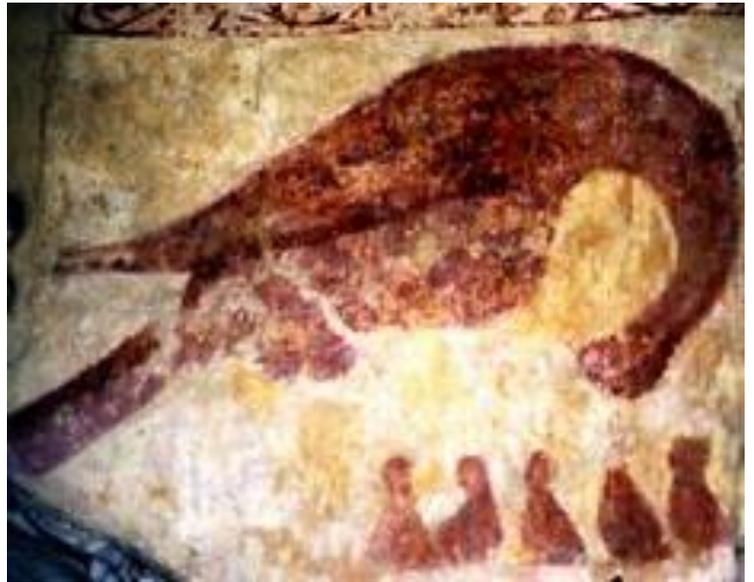


Category 8: Transgressions

Paintings in this category warned against specific sins such as blaspheming and gossiping. There are no examples known in Essex churches.

Category 9: Christian Allegories

The last identified category is that of well-known Christian allegories such as the wheel of fortune, the labours of the month or as in this example from Belchamp Water the pelican feeding her young from her own blood. This image known as the Pelican in her Piety would have been read as an allegory of Christ and the church.



Methods and techniques:



Irene painting a fresco, by the Talbot Master. From Boccacio, *de mulieribus Claris/Le livre de femmes nobles et renomées* (trad. British Library)

Wall paintings are obviously painted on to a wall, but there are different methods of doing this. On the Continent the fresco technique was used. In this method pigment was applied to wet plaster. This bonded together to make a surface which was long lasting. In Britain the secco technique was used. The plaster was coated with lime putty; this was then dampened before colours were applied. It was a more flexible way of painting than the formal fresco, and as it had to be done in small sections was better suited to the English climate, but less enduring. No instance of true fresco has been discovered in England, apart from the outlines on the work at Copford.

The painters mixed their own pigments using easily obtained oxides of iron,

copper, lead, and lime wash, lamp black, red and yellow ochre.



Wall paintings in Longthorpe Tower near Peterborough c.1330

Vermillion and azurite and even gold leaf were used, but usually found only in major churches or royal chapels because they were expensive. Brushes were made from squirrel tails or hogs' bristles.

The paintings were usually outlined in red or scored into the plaster. Sometimes the painter would use black as an under coat to give depth to the colours, especially the flesh. This can be seen at Longthorpe Tower near Peterborough where wax was initially used to preserve the paintings. It had the result of bringing the black pigment to the surface.

In medieval terms it was the people who commissioned paintings who were regarded as having made them not the artist. In the early Middle Ages the patrons tended to be major institutions such as the crown, religions institutions,



aristocracy and big landowners. In later century's the range of patrons grew to include a much larger pool of donors, local manorial families, affluent individuals and even groups of lay people working together in guilds and as parishioners. It was not unusual to include a portrait or at least a representation of the donor in the image, the only surviving example in Essex being an unknown man kneeling before the Virgin at Belchamp Walter (see left). Almost no records survive naming the artists commissioned to carry out the actual paintings however it is clear that the vast majority of artists were lay professionals, rather than monks. Artists learnt their trade in workshops connected to major religious centres and tended to remain in the locality painting churches and manor houses as required.

The first step to making a wall painting was to choose the subject and design. Professional

artists would have a repertoire of standard images that they learnt as apprentices, the patron could also add other images, and this repertoire could then be reproduced in different locations and to different budgets. They may also have kept folders showing cartoons and woodcuts of images, similar to those artists working on glass painting or manuscript illustration. For example see the remarkable similarity in composition between the last suppers at Belchamp Walter (top right) and Fairstead (bottom right) in which Judas is pictured on the nearside of the table, reaching over to steal



a fish from a plate and put it into a string bag. However there is often little consistency in the way images are portrayed suggesting there may a lack of definitive images or literacy sources that artist and patrons could rely on. For example there is no standard order for the seven deadly sins. One area in which standardisation is apparent is the representation of Christ, Mary and the key figures of the gospels. Christ is always shown as an adult male in his early 30s wearing Roman style clothing. The apostles and the Virgin Mary are also not depicted in contemporary



dress unlike other figures in wall paintings. Similar conventions meant the evil doers were often painted in profile and shown to be exaggeratedly ugly with spiky hair and large noses and split coloured clothing that made them as instantly recognisable as a modern pantomime villain as the two images above from Fairstead illustrate.

Positioning



It has been suggested that some subjects may have painted on specific parts of the church for particular reasons, for example the north wall being chosen for its proximity to the pulpit and because it was where women tended to sit when congregations were segregated. The position and popularity of St. Christopher are explained by the pious belief that all who looked upon his representation and invoked his aid were safe that day from a sudden and unprepared death. The Saint is usually depicted as a huge figure grasping a massive staff and bearing on his shoulder the Christ Child as he wades across the stream. Good examples of this in Essex are at Layer Marney, Fairstead, Lambourne End (left) and Little Tey. Given that only a very small fraction of the original paintings survive the evidence will always be inconclusive. In fact often more pragmatic reasons

may account for the positions chosen for certain images such as available space or better lighting. This is especially true in the 15th century when many patrons had the advantage of a newly built blank canvas. This problem is compounded by the vast range of imagery that was popular this this time, in some cases it is possible that older existing schemes were just updated and extended, another possibility is that the patrons, priests and artists chose the images that they liked and that would fit the available appropriate architectural space. With few exceptions, (such as St Christopher always being opposite the door) it may have been enough for priests and congregations to have their favourite images depicted somewhere within the church and concepts of order may have been unimportant to them. This of course is mostly true of smaller country churches, the larger churches with more space and more money, would have had a well-planned and more coherent scheme.

When you first look at the remains of medieval wall paintings in churches today it is easy to assume that these are a single scheme and date but this is very rarely the case. When a substantial number of paintings exist they tend to be a palimpsest created over many centuries, often covered and repainted at regular intervals. At Little Tey during the 1980s the loss of the paint revealed two schemes of medieval paintings dating to the 13th and 14th centuries. These were fully revealed during conservation work in 1995. On the walls of the apse there is an extensive 13th century passion cycle and fragments of later paintings that indicate that a similar narrative cycle was painted there in the 14th c. A single thin layer of white lime wash was applied to the 13th c scheme and the 14th c scheme painted directly on top of it. What we see in Medieval Essex churches now is an accident of recovery, of what has survived, of how they were restored and the simple whim of a Victorian vicar. It is not unusual to find in the literature of early antiquarians stories of one painting being removed to reveal that below.

Lee Joyce and Claire Hooper

Bibliography (for full Bibliography see previous article)

Impey Edward 2014 Longthorpe Tower (English Heritage Red Guides)

The Post-Reformation Wall Paintings Project C B Newham

https://www.academia.edu/13911308/The_Post_Reformation_Wall_Paintings_Project

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 10 May 2021 @ 19:305

The Rudge Lecture – 'Stonehenge: Recent discoveries'.
Speaker: Mike "Mr Stonehenge" Parker Pearson.

A free to all Zoom lecture held by West Essex Archaeological Group. For further information check out our page at Facebook.com/westessexarchaeological or email weagmembership@outlook.com.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83160225144?pwd=UHc2Nk0rVEw5MmcyOFdBMEtqWFdjZz09>

Meeting ID: 831 6022 5144

Passcode: 423983

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.