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Mr G. MONTAGU BENTON then read a paper which was illustrated by lantern slides on

A FOURTEENTH CENTURY WALL-PAINTING IN LOLWORTH CHURCH, REPRESENTING THE INCREDULITY OF S. THOMAS.

The church of All Saints, Lolworth, is situated some six miles from Cambridge, and stands on elevated ground, a little distance to the left of the high road to Huntingdon. Although it can boast of few architectural attractions, it possesses one most interesting feature in the form of a wall-painting to which I wish to draw attention. The plan of the church consists of chancel, nave, south porch, and west tower; and with the exception of the tower, and the south windows of the nave, which are apparently early Perpendicular, is of the late Decorated period. The nave originally had both north and south aisles. These have disappeared, and the arcades of four bays have been built up, leaving only the hood-mouldings of their arches visible; it is worth mentioning that the original capitals, which were exposed last December by the removal of portions of the later wall, are still *in situ*, and two or three retain traces of their original decoration in red paint. The most noteworthy (Plate XI. Fig. 1), shows on one of its sides a pattern of quatre-foils, and on another a lozenge pattern formed of intersecting lines. So much by way of introduction: a detailed description of the church is to appear in the *East Anglian Notes and Queries*¹.

I have been unable to discover with certainty the date when the painting in question was brought to light, but Mr Saint of St Ives has an idea that it was found in 1891, at the time of washing the walls previous to recolouring. When I first saw it, six or seven years ago, it was practically perfect,

¹ Since published, see Vol. xii. (Third Series), pp. 277—282.



Fig. 1. Capital—North arcade.



Fig. 2. The Nave, looking N.W., showing position of painting (indicated by a x).

Lolworth Church, Cambridgeshire.



From a tracing by G. Montagu Benton, 1906.

Wall-painting representing the Incredulity of S. Thomas. 14th century.
Lolworth Church, Cambridgeshire.

save for a serious crack in the wall which ran across its left side. It was still in this condition in April, 1906, when I finished making the tracing reproduced (Plate XII.)¹. This I believe is now the only record of the perfect picture, for a few months later it became imperative to plaster up the fracture in the wall, which necessitated the obliterating of a small part of the design.

The painting is quite small, measuring originally 27" x 19", and is situated on the north wall of the nave, about two feet from the west wall and eight feet from the ground (Plate XI. Fig. 2). At first sight the position appears to be a peculiar one, but I think the blocked up nave arcade may possibly account for it. The nave walls of our mediaeval churches, when without aisles, were frequently decorated with tiers of pictures, the spaces not occupied by the figure designs being decorated with masonry and other patterns. This seems to have been the original scheme of decoration at Lolworth, but when the walls were pierced for the erection of the aisles, the paintings of course perished: the one exception now recorded owing its preservation to that portion of the wall whereon it is situated, being left intact.

The picture is coarsely drawn, but is of great value in being a rare page in the *liber laicorum* of mediaeval England. It undoubtedly represents the "Incredulity of S. Thomas," a subject very seldom met with in English wall-paintings, although it possesses a sacramental significance, and also occurs in most of the early series of the life of Christ, as, not only an event in His mission; but also as a proof of His resurrection.

Our Lord is standing, and is shown in the act of thrusting the left hand of the kneeling saint into the wound in His side. He is depicted with long hair, which falls on His shoulders, and a pointed beard, while a cruciferous nimbus surrounds the head. His dress is a tunic-like garment falling to the knees, with low neck, and tight-fitting sleeves, over which is worn a short kind of cloak, divided in front, one end being caught up over the left arm. In the left hand He holds the banner of

¹ A copy of the original tracing has been presented to the Museum of Archaeology, where it is now preserved in the Library.

victory, the cross with pennon attached. The legs and feet are bare; rays of light are shown emanating from the wounds in the side and right foot. Crude as the drawing is, the artist has succeeded in giving a certain dignity to the expression.

S. Thomas, who is also portrayed with long hair and a beard, has a plain nimbus, and is robed in a kind of kirtle and mantle, which give him an almost feminine appearance. In his right hand he carries the *Textus* or book of the Gospels (a small volume with two clasps), in allusion to the story of his having preached the gospel in India—a tradition which in mediaeval times gave the apostle the appellation of "S. Thomas of India." This last characteristic is unique in the series of English wall-paintings of the same subject.

The whole picture is outlined in red-ochre, and flat tints of yellow and red are used. This was a common mode of execution in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and it is possibly to the middle of the latter period that we may assign this painting.

As far as I have been able to trace, only four other instances of the "Incredulity" have been recorded, and of these, only two are in existence. An example, dating from the thirteenth century, remained at Preston, Sussex, to within a year or two ago, when it was unfortunately destroyed by fire: it was extremely interesting, as being represented in conjunction with the similar subject of our Lord's appearance to S. Mary in the garden; the two pictures were almost identical, except that in the "Noli Me tangere," the hand of Christ, instead of pointing to His side, was thrust out in a repelling attitude. Coloured illustrations of both pictures will be found in Volume XXIII. of *Archaeologia*.

Another example, possibly of the fourteenth century, is at Rotherfield, Sussex. Our Lord is shown considerably above life size, and the kneeling saint, as in our specimen, has a somewhat feminine appearance¹.

The third example, at S. Albans Abbey, is also of large

¹ See 'Description of the Mural Paintings at the Churches of Clayton and Rotherfield, Sussex.' By C. E. Keyser, M.A., F.S.A. *Sussex Arch. Collect.* Vol. XL, p. 220.

size (nearly 9 feet by 6 feet), and well executed, with canopied background. Near the figure of our Lord is a scroll, bearing in black-letter the inscription "BEATI · Q · NON · VIDERÜT · & · CREDIDERÜT"; and near S. Thomas one bearing the ejaculation "DÑS · MEUS · & · DEUS · MEUS." It is of early fifteenth century date¹.

The fourth example was formerly at Wighton, Norfolk; on making enquiries as to its existence, I received the following reply from the Vicar: "Some years ago when the church was restored, an impression appeared on the wall of the nave like that you refer to, but on being exposed to light it faded away²."

¹ See *Archaeological Journal*: Vol. II. p. 387 (for illustration); and Vol. XXXIX. pp. 68, 69 (for extracts from the *Annales* of Joh. Amundesham relating to this painting).

² I here wish to thank Mr N. H. J. Westlake, F.S.A., and Mr P. Mainwaring Johnston, F.R.I.B.A., both authorities on English wall-paintings, for kindly reading through the first draft of the foregoing remarks when in MS.

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