

WALL PAINTINGS IN THE CHURCH OF ST. PEGA, PEAKIRK, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

By E. CLIVE ROUSE

In the first volume of the *Archaeological Journal*¹ the following entry occurs: 'Mr. C. R. Smith read a letter from Mr. Edmund Tyrell Artis of Castor in Northamptonshire stating that paintings had recently been discovered on the walls of five of the churches in that neighbourhood, Castor, Etton, Orton, Peakirk and Yaxley. The subjects, which are accompanied with inscriptions, are scriptural, and differ from each other, but the colours are the same in all, and the great similarity in style leads Mr. Artis to believe that they were executed by the same artist'.

In view of this report I inspected all the churches concerned; and it may be observed that in fact the paintings in these places are, or were, widely different in subject and in date, and have little if anything in common. Thus Keyser² gives the Deposition; the Entombment; the Sale of Joseph by his Brethren; St. Christopher; the Martyrdom of St. Agatha and the Martyrdom of St. Catherine as the subjects at Castor, of which only three scenes in the Life of St. Catherine, of the early 14th century, survive. The old plaster at Etton has been entirely destroyed: but Keyser³ gives the Stem of Jesse, of the 13th century, as appearing there. The Orton (Longueville) painting is a very late 15th-century St. Christopher. The Peakirk paintings we now know to have a Passion cycle, a St. Christopher, two Moralities or warning pictures, and two unidentified scenes, mostly of the 14th century, as well as post-Reformation texts. Those at Yaxley include a late 14th-century post-Resurrection series, a Doom of the 15th century, and Time and Death and other 16th or 17th-century subjects and texts.

The Peakirk paintings cannot, therefore, be claimed as an entirely new discovery, though their extent and identification were quite unknown until my work on them in 1950 and 1951. We must at least be thankful that Mr. Artis was sufficiently alive to the interest of such things in 1844 to make a note. I suspect that they were found during the course of extensive structural and plaster repairs about that time, when a series of heavy iron ties was bolted through from the north nave wall below the clerestory to the wall-plate of the aisle roof, damaging many of the Passion scenes, and when also a buttress was erected against a crack or settlement in the heavily leaning north aisle wall, thus destroying the first of the Deaths in the Three Living and Three Dead subject. The remains were evidently then rewhitewashed, for some, which had already been exposed at this time, were only thinly obscured, while others retained their full covering of many layers of post-Reformation limewash

¹ *Arch. Journ.*, i (1844-5), 158.

² *List of Buildings having Mural Decorations* (1883), 58.

³ *Op. cit.*, 100.

and texts. Thus they remained until I commenced work on the uncovering in 1950.

In 1947 I had noticed, on a casual visit, traces of colour in the north aisle where the insertion of a bracket for a curtain pole had brought away limewash. I suggested that before any of the interior redecorating then contemplated was done a thorough examination of the walls should be made. This I was invited to do by the Rector, the Rev. St. A. F. St. John, and Church Council in February, 1949, the architect in charge of structural and decorative repairs having left no instructions that watch should be kept for any painting that might survive, and my tests revealed traces of paintings all over the nave and in both aisles. Uncovering them was eventually started in 1950. As a result of some seven months' work a series of six medieval subjects, including the Passion in eleven or more scenes, and evidence of much fragmentary painting have been revealed, preserved and recorded.

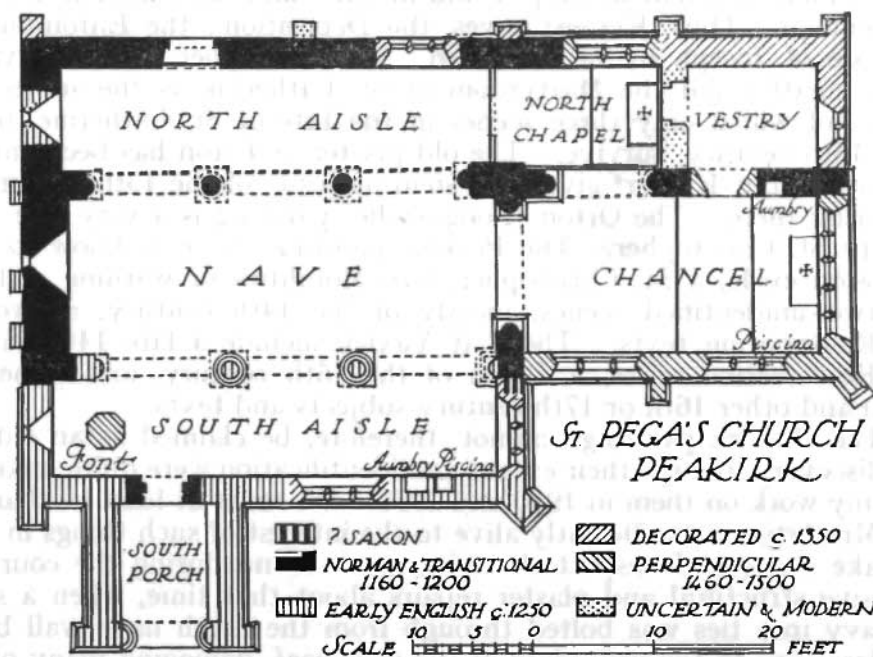


Fig. 1

THE CHURCH

The Church is dedicated to St. Pega, the only dedication to this Saint in England, according to Francis Bond,¹ the village name itself, Peakirk, deriving from Pega's Church. St. Pega was the sister of St. Guthlac, of Crowland, not many miles away, and is said to have founded some kind of hermitage or small religious community in the

¹ *Dedications of English Churches* (1914), 79, 192, 327.

village when on a visit to her brother's hermitage in the Fen. A much restored medieval chapel does exist elsewhere in the village, now incorporated in the modern premises of a sisterhood; and there is the curious fact that the north chapel and vestry or sacristy of the parish church goes with this establishment. No structural work coeval with the Saint or her brother, the early 8th century, survives in parish church or hermitage chapel.

The church (plan, fig. 1) consists of a chancel with a north vestry or sacristy, a north chapel, a nave of three bays with north and south aisles, a south porch, and a triple western bell turret of Rutland type. It is not necessary to discuss the church architecturally in detail,¹ but it may be stated that the reset south door, the west wall, the north arcade, and the north wall are Norman, probably of the second half of the 12th century. There is an extremely questionable piece of 'long and short' work in the south-east quoin of the nave. The chancel arch is transitional. The south arcade and aisle were rebuilt and windows inserted in the west wall in the 13th century. The vestry appears to be of the 14th century as well as the windows in the north and south aisles. The chancel, with its fine east window almost filling the east wall, is a 15th-century rebuilding, and the nave clerestory is probably also to be ascribed to this time.

THE PAINTINGS

NAVE. Subject 1. *The Passion Cycle* (Pls. XXXII-XXXV)

The whole of the wall above the north arcade is occupied by an extensive Passion series, eleven scenes remaining intact or in a fragmentary condition: and there were probably several more. The series is in two rows, framed and divided horizontally by a chevron or perspective cube motif in red and white, painted as if in relief. The scenes are divided from each other by little pillars and capitals in yellow. The set is interrupted by an enormous painting of St. Christopher, contemporary with it, of which more will be said later. The two single-light, trefoiled clerestory windows also break into the subjects, and there is heavy damage by plaster failures towards the east end, by the iron ties already mentioned and, at the top, by a later roof.

The Cycle at present commences at the west end, somewhat unusually, with

(a) *The Last Supper*, of which the top and western portion are destroyed (Pl. XXXIII A). A comparison with ten other painted Passion cycles shows that in seven of them the set commences with the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper being the second scene in six cases.

¹ For this see the Rev. W. D. Sweeting, *Hist. and Archit. Notes on the Parish Churches in*

and around Peterborough (1868), 63-70.

The Peakirk painting measures about 7 ft. x $2\frac{3}{4}$ ft. in its present damaged condition. It is twice the length of most of the other scenes in this series, and there does not appear room for another on the west. The west wall itself yielded no evidence of painting, and I suspect a renewal of perished plaster. The Supper table is tilted up so as to show the vessels upon it. There is a fringed table-cloth with a panelled quatrefoil border on the right. The form of a pair of one-handled flagons or standing cups is of interest. What are probably intended for loaves can also be identified, as well as two knives and a fish on a platter. The feet and robes of six apostles can be seen below the table, and traces of several of the figures above. A red robe, with an outstretched arm, which would have been approximately in the centre of the composition almost certainly belongs to the figure of Our Lord. Judas was probably seated on the opposite or near side of the table, shown in the act of dipping in the same dish with Christ.¹ The east, or right-hand edge of this scene ends against the border of the large St. Christopher painting which extends the whole height of the wall. Skipping over this, one comes to the second Passion scene in the upper row.

(b) *Christ washing the Disciples' feet* (Pl. XXXIII B). This is a scene rarely met with in surviving Passion Cycles. In fact, out of the ten with which comparison is being made, it occurs only in one, namely at Wiston in Suffolk.² The panel now measures $3\frac{1}{4}$ ft. x $3\frac{1}{2}$ ft., including the lower border, but is damaged at the top, and cut into by a clerestory window on the east. Christ is shown kneeling in the centre, with the rather stumpy red beard and exaggeratedly long red hair which are reserved for him as an identification mark throughout the series. He holds a towel and touches the outstretched foot of a seated Disciple on the right, probably intended for St. Peter, whose hand is raised in wonder. In the background a group of heads, now only eight in number, represent some of the other Disciples.

A later clerestory window here breaks into the upper row of paintings, and further east there is heavy damage through plaster failure; in this last area the whole wall was loose behind 17th-century hair plaster and later repairs, and daylight could be seen at one point. The next scene, therefore, is very fragmentary; but from the probable sequence and the visible remains it is likely that it represented

(c) *The Betrayal*. There have evidently been a number of figures, and the scene was one of some elaboration. It seems to have been rather longer than the average length of the other scenes, though perhaps not as large as the Last Supper. At any rate the divisions do not correspond with those in the lower row.

¹ The whole treatment is not unlike this scene in the late 13th-century Passion series at Fairstead, Essex. See E. W. Tristram, *Eng. Med.*

Wall Painting: The Thirteenth Century (1950, ii, Pl. 173.

² See Tristram, *op. cit.*, Pl. 188.

(d) The next scene is entirely destroyed. It is likely to have been *Christ before Pilate*. Then follows

(e) *The Mocking and Buffeting* (Pl. XXXIIIc). This scene, though a good deal damaged, is perfectly clear in its main essentials. Christ, with the usual very long hair over both shoulders, stands in the centre in a long white robe with grey shading. His hands bound before Him. Tormentors on either side pull a cloth over His head and one has his hand up to strike Him. The figure on the left is made deliberately grotesque, in red and white parti-coloured clothes and with a large head. This was a convention observed for indicating wicked or evil characters. The other wears a knee-length gown with elaborate drapery folds on the long, falling sleeve, or from a shoulder cape. The action is vigorous and expressive. This scene, though not exactly rare, only occurs in half the ten Passion cycles I am considering by way of comparison, at Croughton, Wiston, Chalgrove, Southease, West Chilton, Fairstead, Winterbourne Dauntsey, Capel, Battle and Winchester. Fairstead, and the now almost vanished series at Battle, seem to have been particularly concerned with what one may call the preliminaries to the Crucifixion, having the Betrayal, the Crowning with Thorns, the Mocking, the Scourging, and several appearances before Pilate or Caiaphas.

Another clerestory window cuts into the east end of this scene, and it is doubtful whether there was ever another one beyond it. We return now to the west end and commence the lower row with a very fragmentary scene.

(f) *The Scourging* (?) (Pl. XXXIVa). Only parts of two figures now remain. But that on the left, formerly in the centre of the panel, is clearly Our Lord with the very long hair, and a nimbus, while the other is a tormentor. A yellow pillar divides this scene, $4\frac{1}{2}$ ft. x 3 ft., from the next.

(g) *Carrying the Cross* or *Christ led away to be Crucified* (?) (Pl. XXXIVb). This again is somewhat damaged, but the central figure is that of Christ with the same hair as before and a clear Cruciform nimbus. A figure on the left in an interesting red and white chequered robe and black shoes touches Our Lord with one hand and possibly brandishes something in the other—or this may be part of the cross, carried by Our Lord. The other figure, in knee-length red robe and black shoes, drags Our Lord by a rope, and points towards the destination, Calvary, or Christ's eventual fate. Both these scenes have an undulating yellow base above the containing perspective border. Once again, the great St. Christopher interrupts the series, and we continue east of this with some of the best preserved scenes.

(h) *The Crucifixion, Christ's side pierced* (Pl. XXXVa). $3\frac{3}{4}$ ft. x 2 ft. 10 ins. The Crucified Christ is in the centre, with cream loin cloth lined in purple-red with black outline, the feet crossed and secured with one nail. Longinus is on the left. He pierces Our Lord's side with a spear,

his blindness being indicated by the left eye which is closed. The right eye is open, to which he points to emphasise the miracle of the restoration of his sight, while he kneels to acknowledge the miracle. On the right stands the Centurion, or a Roman Soldier, in a curious spiked helmet or circlet, with a bucket in one hand, and proffering the vinegar on a sponge at the end of a long pole with the other. The details of this scene will be discussed later. Next, separated by a brownish-yellow pillar with well defined base, follows

(i) *The Deposition* (Pl. XXXVA) panel, 3 ft. 7 ins. x 2 ft. 10 ins. The drooping body of Christ is upheld by a figure at the back with yellow hair and long gown of white lined with yellow, and black shoes. On the right, Nicodemus with yellow beard, in red and pink parti-coloured robe and characteristic Jewish Rabbi's hat, kneels to remove the nail from the feet. In both this and the preceding scene the cross is very narrow and has an exceptionally long cross arm.

The next scene, 3½ ft. x 2 ft. 10 ins., is heavily damaged, but sufficient remains to identify it as

(j) *The Entombment* (Pl. XXXVB). The tomb is shown as a medieval table-tomb with an arcaded side of three arches, in deep blue-grey with black and red outline. Joseph of Arimathea can be seen at the head of the tomb, and a female figure with long hair in the centre, probably the Virgin. There is evidence of a figure, possibly St. John, standing at the foot of the tomb. Following this is another scene, a good deal damaged, but more complete than the last, also 3½ ft. x 2 ft. 10 ins.

(k) *The Resurrection* (Pl. XXXVB). Angels kneel at each end of the tomb, as at Croughton, that on the left being destroyed all but the hair and part of one wing. Our Lord steps out of the tomb, blessing with His right hand, holding the Vexillum in the other, on to the shoulder of one of the Roman soldiers in the arches below the tomb. The surviving part of the first soldier is in mail with surcoat and helmet. The centre one is in 'banded mail'—or a leather surcoat studded with metal, having mail beneath and a kind of *chapel de fer* on his head. The third, asleep on his hand, also wears mail and a *chapel de fer*.

What is at present the final scene, now mutilated at the east end by a clerestory window and the opening of the 15th-century rood stair discovered in the course of the work, measures 5 ft. x 2 ft. 10 ins., and is again more of the scale of the Last Supper. It is

(l) *The Noli me tangere, or Christ's Appearance to Mary Magdalene* in the garden. Mary Magdalene, hands outstretched, kneels on the left. She wears a long white robe, outlined and shaded as to the drapery in black or grey. She has the usual characteristic of long hair, and her mouth is open. In the centre is a curious tree, with stumps of lopped branches on the trunk, and the general appearance of a pollarded willow which would have been familiar to people in this area on the edge of the Fen. Our Lord appears on the right, partly draped, the wounds showing on the feet, one hand formerly upraised, the other grasping the Vexillum.

We may now consider the series as a whole. With 12 scenes, it is a reasonably extensive set, the others I have mentioned ranging from 4 scenes at Capel to 12 at Croughton and Chalgrove, with Winterbourne Dauntsey and Fairstead each having 11, the rest varying from 7 to 10. The omission of the Triumphal Entry, the Harrowing of Hell (between the Entombment and the Resurrection), and of any scene after the Appearance to Mary Magdalene (the Ascension in particular as a termination to the series), is unusual but not without precedent. And the inclusion of the rare scenes of the Washing of the feet, and the Mocking and Buffeting has already been commented upon.

Artistically, the work is not of a high order, though, as always, the sense of decoration is admirable, and the scenes have a forcefulness, and indeed a very moving quality, by reason of their naïve directness. This is the people's art: and I find many very close analogies in a number of the scenes with the alabasters in which Dr. Hildburgh discerns echoes of the Religious Drama.¹ In particular, the Crucifixion is of interest for its dramatic treatment. This is not what one may call the 'formal' Crucifixion reserved for altar backs or isolated paintings, with the posed figures of Mary and John, but is the moving, dramatic story, with the miracle of Longinus. Here the artist has contrived in the one scene four separate facts or moments of the story—the piercing of the side; Longinus' blindness (one eye closed); the restoration of his sight (one eye open and finger pointing); and his conversion or acknowledgement of the miracle in his kneeling attitude. It is yet another revealing and admirable example of the conventions by which these pictures were made intelligible to illiterate congregations, who would, moreover, have been familiar with the treatment of this and other Passion Scenes, in the Morality or Miracle plays performed in such towns as Peterborough, Crowland or Stamford, all not far away. The hat of Nicodemus in the Deposition is of interest, for it is of a conventional form reserved to denote the Jewish Rabbi, and may be seen in the same subject in the Holy Sepulchre Chapel paintings at Winchester, more than half a century earlier. This scene, too, has an unusually touching and pathetic quality. And since the features are well preserved it can be seen that there seems to have been a rare attempt at facial expression.

Subject 2. St. Christopher I (Pl. XXXIXA).

A further interesting insight into the medieval mind is provided by the painting of St. Christopher already referred to. The subject is contemporary with the Passion Cycle, but breaks right into it. It seems that the artist, and people, were perfectly happy to interrupt

¹ W. L. Hildburgh, *English Alabaster Carvings as Records of the Medieval Religious Drama*, in *Archaeologia* (1949), xciii, 51–101. Another paper which is very relevant to the present subject is that by E. W. Tristram and M. R. James in *Archaeologia* (1926–7), lxxvi, 179–204,

where the Croughton paintings are discussed. The Passion Cycle there is dated early 14th century, and has some resemblances to Peakirk. The thin cross occurs; also the same type of border, though more detailed and accomplished. The Longinus episode is also not unlike.

a sequence of paintings representing so sacred a thing as the Passion of Our Lord, so that the friendly, familiar figure of St. Christopher could come in his own accustomed place opposite the south door where he was readily seen by those setting out on a journey who wished his protection.

The painting, even in its present mutilated state, is 9½ ft. high and 5 ft. 4 ins. wide, including the borders. These upright borders are of faded black or grey outlined in yellow, with white diamond shapes also outlined in yellow in each of which is a five petalled rose or flower in pink with red centre and divisions between the petals. The water at the base is in irregular, flowing red and white lines with traces of fish in black. Above this, the river banks are in yellow. The whole of the rest of the background is covered with double scroll-work with trefoil leaves, and tendrils (a primitive vine-scroll) in deep red. On the left is the unusual feature, in a St. Christopher painting, of a kneeling donor with a scroll, now illegible, balanced by a mermaid on the right, with comb and mirror, and another indecipherable scroll. The saint has bare legs and is clad in a white cloak with hood or cape lined with red and having an elaborate edging. His staff is long and straight, and is in fact in the form of a pillar with base and bell-capital. The child was carried on the saint's left shoulder (spectator's right). The composition remains formal and simple, and must have been impressive and dignified. As will be seen later, on the defacement of this painting, and the Passion series, by structural changes, it was replaced by another St. Christopher in the north aisle.

We may now consider the evidence for the dating of this series. The scroll is well developed and must belong to the 14th century. But the primitive form of the staff suggests that it cannot be far on in the century. The drawing of the features and the costume in the Passion scenes seems to indicate a date in the first half of the 14th century. The border is of a type which, with variations of detail, persisted over a long period and is not a very reliable guide for close dating. On the whole, on all the evidence, I am inclined to place these paintings about midway between the first and second quarters of the 14th century. All these paintings were obliterated long before the Reformation—in fact in the 15th century, when the clerestory and rood stair were added and the pitch of the roof altered. There were traces of later texts over them in places.

There was evidence of painting elsewhere in the nave, but it was mostly of too fragmentary a nature either to identify or preserve. The east wall of the nave had been painted, apparently at the same time as the Passion Cycle. One would expect a Doom in this position, but it will have been largely destroyed when the gable-end was altered for the flatter pitch of the 15th-century roof.

The chancel arch itself bears traces of decoration. The 'perspective cube' pattern, the same as in the Passion Cycle borders (Pls. XXXII–XXXV), occurs on the outer chamfered order; and chevrons on the soffit of the arch.

There has been an elaborate subject in the south-east return corner of the nave, interrupted by a hole for the end of a former screen beam ; but its condition is too fragmentary for identification. The rest of the south wall bore no evidence of medieval painting. This is not an unusual feature, for while some church naves were painted on both sides (Pickering, Yorks., is an outstanding example), just as many were only painted on the north side, where the better light from the south would help to make them clearer. (Pickworth, Lincs., is an example of this,¹ and Raunds, Northants., another, where the north side is elaborately painted, and the south blank.) There were, however, faint traces of post-Reformation texts ; and a tolerably complete one of a somewhat unusual kind is preserved opposite the St. Christopher. It takes the form of a black-letter text on a continuous scroll, passing in front of and behind a tree. It is in black outline, with shading in grey and perhaps a toned background, certainly to the back of the scroll behind the tree, in a faint purple-red. The text is Colossians 3, 1. ' If ye be risen with Christ ', etc., the Epistle for Easter Day. It is probably 16th century in date.

The west wall yielded no evidence of colour ; and it was disappointing to find the great splays of the 12th and 13th-century lights—a favourite place for figures of Saints—blank. I suspect a renewal of perished plaster.

Some red colouring occurs on the south-west pier and respond of the south arcade.

SOUTH AISLE, Subject 3. (Unidentified)

The plaster in the south aisle has been heavily patched and renewed. But one subject remains in the south-east corner, where it was obviously connected with an altar, since it is placed over the surviving aumbry and piscina.

The subject is very imperfect, having been badly damaged by the insertion of a 19th-century wall tablet, now moved further west, and has so far defied all efforts at interpretation. The main outlines of the scene can, however, be described. The whole measures just over 6½ ft. x 5½ ft., being within a border 4½ ins. to 5 ins. wide. The form of this border varies from the ' perspective cube ' used throughout the nave and north aisle, being of an undulating red and white pattern with counter-changed white and red roundels in the spaces. The corners are squared off, and each contains a charming four-leaved hawthorn foliage pattern.

There are two main figures in the subject, that on the left is apparently in grey cloak with red tunic or surcoat beneath and is seated on a throne. One leg and foot is clearly visible, and appears to be in armour, or with a very elaborate long pointed shoe or solleret. This figure leans over and with a long stick, spear or lance, appears to strike a shorter object held in the right (spectator's left) hand of a second figure who inclines towards the first ; the other hand of the

¹ *Journ. B.A.A.* (1950), xiii, 24–33.

second figure is raised as if in wonder. Between the two figures are a number of indeterminate lines mostly running in a diagonal direction, and some patches of more solid red and yellow. Beneath the second major figure is one on a slightly smaller scale, apparently kneeling on one knee and holding a long white rod or staff which nearly touches the base of the throne on which the first major figure sits. Below this smaller figure is a fragment of contemporary Gothic script lettering, at present unintelligible.

The Judgment of Solomon has been suggested for this : but I think it unlikely. A more possible interpretation is David and Saul ; but again it would be a rare if not unique instance. The Enticement of Samson, cutting off his hair and putting out his eyes also occurs to one. But it is difficult to see how any of these scenes could have been connected with the dedication of the nearby altar. On the whole it seems likely that the scene depicts the torture or execution of a Saint.

Both above and below this are traces of painting. The border suggests a date somewhat earlier in the 14th century than the Passion series.

NORTH AISLE

There is much painting of several dates throughout the north aisle, and three subjects are identifiable.

Subject 4. (Unidentified)

At the east end of the aisle on the north wall, again, one suspects, in connection with the dedication of an altar there, is a single subject in an isolated frame. This is even more fragmentary than the scene in the south aisle opposite. It is in a frame composed of the 'perspective cube', or modified chevron pattern border, used in the Passion Cycle and is interrupted by the screen dividing the aisle from the north chancel chapel, which has been moved more than once. It measures about 6 ft. x 5½ ft. An innovation here is the powdering of the background by small flowers composed of six red dots surrounding a central one. The only identifiable feature is a figure on the left, clearly that of a soldier, tormentor or executioner, since he wears a close-fitting mail coif with possibly a surcoat, and has a grotesquely large and long nose—another example of the deliberate caricaturing of evil characters as a convention of this popular visual art. There are traces of a female (?) head and figure in the centre, having long hair. And one can only conjecture that the torture or execution of a female Saint, Catherine perhaps, or Margaret, is represented.

Subject 5. The Three Living and Three Dead (Pls. XXXVII–XXXVIII).

In the centre section of the aisle, between the large three-light window and the north door, is one of the best preserved subjects in the church, only damaged by a plaster repair in the centre in connection with the

building in Victorian times of a buttress against a settlement crack. This is a fine rendering of the Morality of the Three Living and Three Dead.

The whole subject has probably measured about 11½ ft. x 6 ft., but is damaged at the top, and has the break in the centre already mentioned. It is enclosed in the same 'perspective cube' or chevron type border used in the Passion Cycle, alternating in red and white or pink, with the triangular spaces at top and bottom in a slaty colour. The artist has had a good deal of difficulty in getting this complicated pattern round the corners, on the left he has carried the vertical frame to the bottom; the bottom border or frame he has carried out to the right-hand edge. The whole background here is of a pinky tone and is powdered with the small flowers of six red roundels surrounding a central one as seen in the fragmentary subject further east in the same aisle.

The three Living Kings are on the left, and stand on an undulating yellow base similar to scenes (f) and (g) in the Passion Cycle. All are elaborately, even sumptuously, clad, and exhibit a later development of the story not found in the de Lisle Psalter treatment.¹ (Pl. XXXVIIb). This is the fact that the three Kings are shown as of different ages, to reinforce the grim warning that death may overtake one not only no matter how grand one's earthly station may be, but also at any time of life. This feature is again seen in the painting of this subject at Tarrant Crawford, Dorset (Pl. XXXVIII c, d),² which may be somewhat earlier than the Peakirk example.³ In other particulars, the common origin of this and other early treatments of the scene in the Arundel MS. version is clear enough.

The first King, on the right, is an old man, indicated by the length and straggling nature of his hair and beard. He has one gauntlet-gloved hand upraised in horror at the vision of the Deaths. It is uncertain what the attitude of the other is. He wears a deep red cloak, powdered with small fleurs-de-lys, and having a yellow lining. His under-robe is calf-length, and is striped in black, having the most elaborate series of embroidered bands at top and bottom. The top has first a black scroll on grey followed by a second one: next a series of grey quatrefoils on a red ground, and finally double red chevrons on grey. The bottom hem has first a row of red crosses on white: next a black chevron, with red ornament in the triangular spaces, then a plain red line, and finally a deep yellow band with black patterning. His hose are light coloured.

¹ B.M. MS. Arundel 83, f. 127.

² Not yet published. But see Guide to the Church.

³ For a discussion of the Arundel and Paris Arsenal MSS. and the early version of the story see Robert Freyham, 'English Influences on Parisian Painting of about 1300', in *Burl. Mag.* (1929), liv., 320-30. For a list of wall paintings of this subject up to that date, see Miss E. Carleton-Williams 'Mural Paintings of the Three Living and the Three Dead in England'

in *Journ. B.A.A.* (1942), vii, 31-40. Another important addition is the example at Longthorpe Tower, Peterborough, not far away, described in preliminary notices in *Country Life*, 4th April, 1947, and *Ill. Lond. News*, 5th Nov., 1949. A full account is forthcoming in *Archaeologia*. A further example of later date and rather different character is that at Pickworth, Lincs., described by me in *Journ. B.A.A.* (1950), xiii, 24-33.

The centre King stands close to the first and holds a sword, as a symbol of earthly power or strength, in his left hand. His hair and beard are shorter and tidier and he has the same indications of a flattish crown with large rounded trefoil ornaments, hardly yet the true fleur-de-lys. He wears a yellow tunic, visible at the neck, and a pink calf-length or longer robe with free scroll-work in black or grey with red tendrils. Over all is a cloak of cream or pinky-grey, patterned with elaborate and free scroll-work in black or dark grey. The cloak is lined with deep red and is caught across the breast by a round morse, falling in elaborate folds in front and at the side. His hose are deep red with a trellis-pattern in pink. The shoes are long and pointed. He looks towards his other companion, and touches him on the shoulder with his right (spectator's left) hand as if to call his attention to the fearful apparitions.

The third King on the left is a young man, clean shaven and with 'bobbed' hair just below the ears. His crown is the clearest of the three. His costume, one feels, is the latest thing for the smart younger set. It consists of a deep red tunic, cross-patterned in black, rather like the red and white check robe of the tormentor in Passion Scene (f), knee-length, and lined in a lighter colour. There is a yellow belt, to hold the misericord or dagger, and hanging from it in front is a purse or wallet of black, cross-patterned in white, and having a lion's mask in red on a diamond-shaped panel in the centre. He wears a shoulder-cape of ermine, with long sleeves in dark red, lined grey-black, hanging from the elbows. He looks towards the Deaths and has his hands clasped before him as if to moralise on the awful vision, his sceptre, symbol of earthly rank, tucked neatly under one arm (compare this attitude with the Arundel Psalter and Tarrant Crawford). (Pls. XXXVII B, XXXVIII C, D). His hose are light, with traces of grey; and his pointed shoes are pink.

The Deaths are the most horrifying in my experience. The first is destroyed, all but one bony hand and a piece of shroud near the first King, and a shoulder and part of an arm near the second skeleton. It is painted in yellow, brown and black. Something resembling a tree seems to have separated this figure from the Living.

The second Death has an abbreviated shroud over its head, and tucked negligently over one arm, the hand resting on its breast, while the other hand touches the third Death on the shoulder, almost mimicking the action of the central living King. There appears to be a bandage over the mouth—or it may be the grinning mouth itself, which has lost the indications of the teeth. The figure is a deep yellow or brown, outlined in heavy red, the anatomy being of a very peculiar nature.

The third Death is fainter than the last, in yellow with grey or faded black outline, and is naked with hands at its sides as in the de Lisle Psalter illustration. The toes, feet and finger bones are incised in the plaster.

The really horrifying feature of the painting is the emphasis which has been laid on the symbols of corruption. In contrast to the flowered

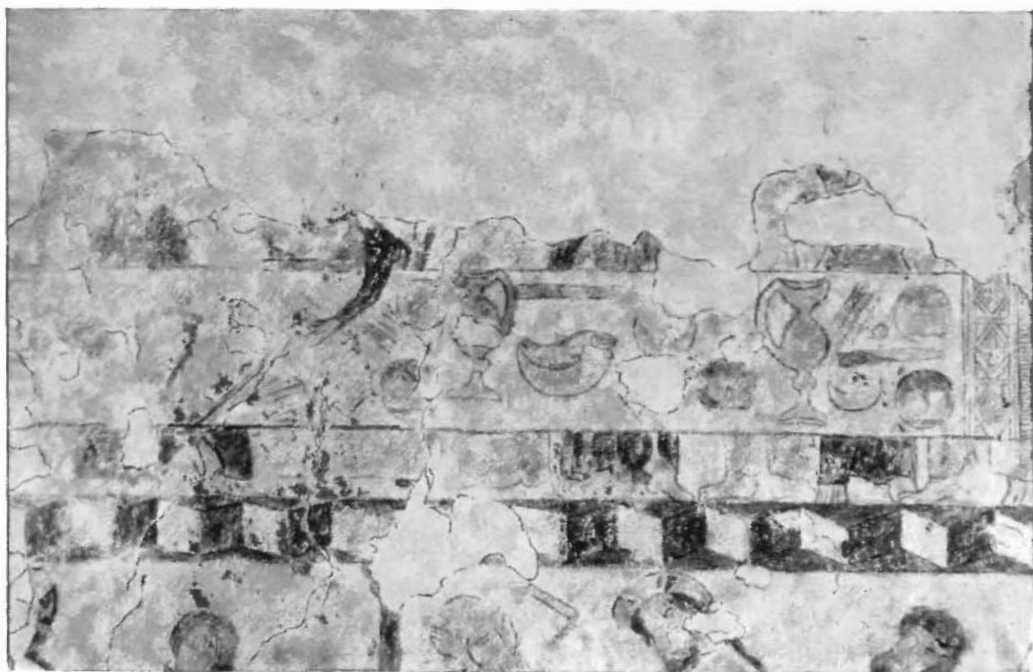


A. Peakirk. Paintings above the N. Arcade

(Photo : Rev. St. A. F. St. John)



B. Peakirk. Measured sketch of N. Arcade and Aisle to show placing of the Paintings



A. Peakirk Passion Cycle. The Last Supper



B. Peakirk. Passion Cycle. Christ washing the Disciples' feet



C. The Mocking and Buffeting of Christ



A. Peakirk. The Passion Cycle. The scourging and carrying of the Cross or Christ led away to be Crucified



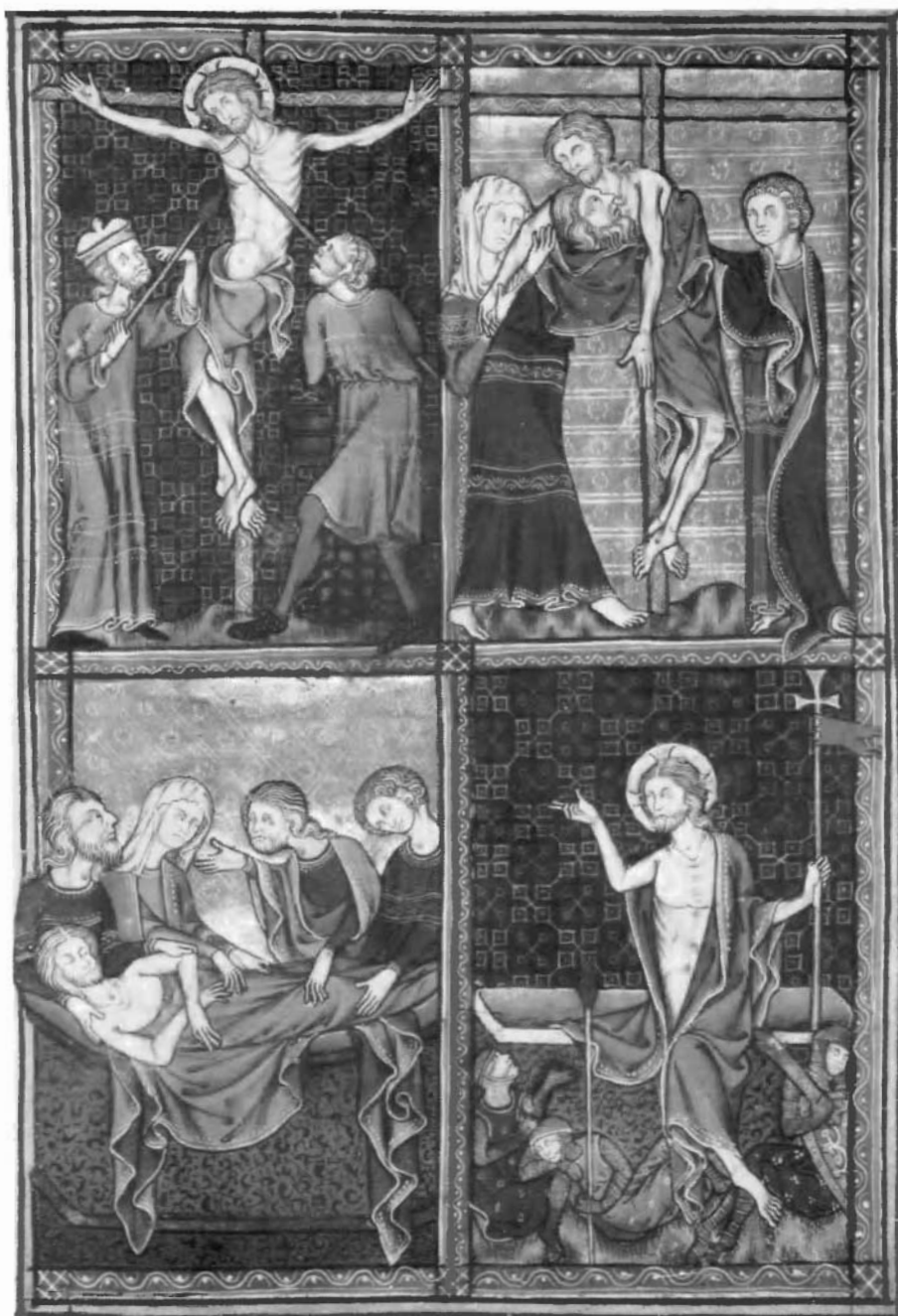
B. Scourging

Carrying the Cross

(From Bodleian MS. Barlow 22. Reproduced by kind permission of the Curators of the Bodleian Library)



Peakirk Passion Cycle. A. The Crucifixion and Deposition,
B. The Entombment and Resurrection.



The Crucifixion and Longinus,
The Entombment

and

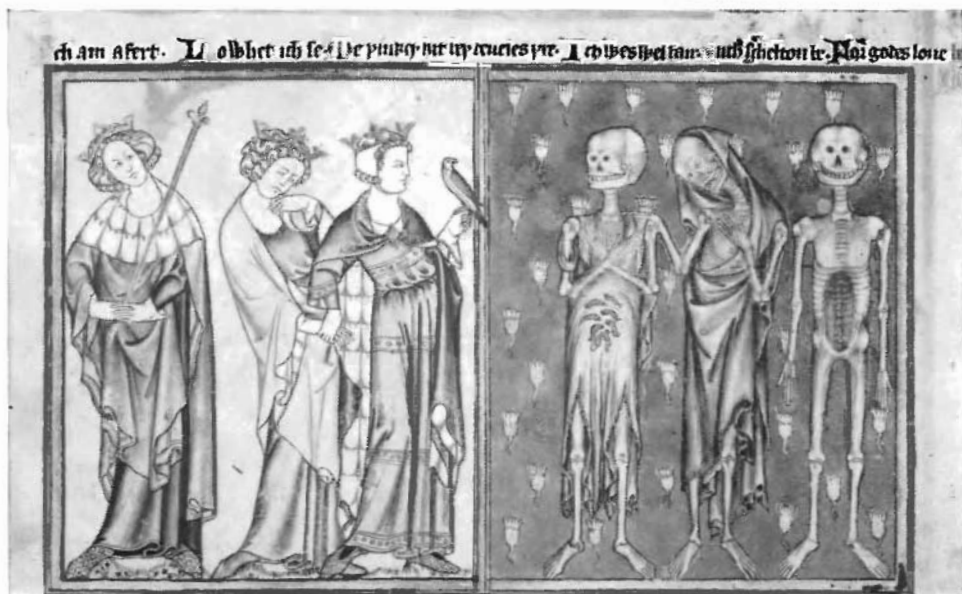
The Deposition,
The Resurrection

(Bodleian MS. Barlow 22. Reproduced by kind permission of the Curators of the Bodleian Library)



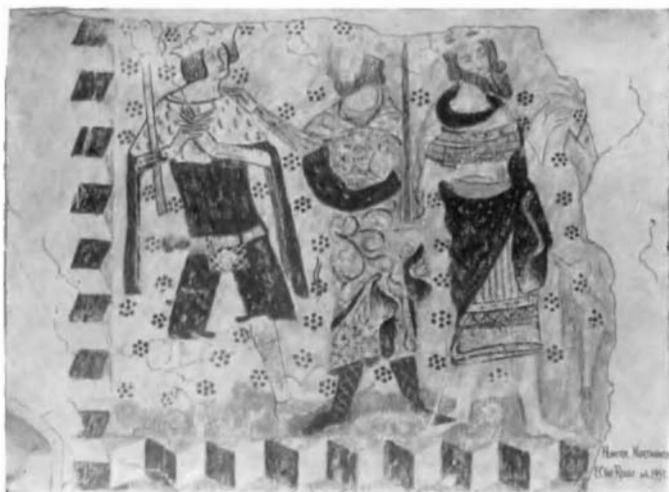
A. Peakirk. N. Aisle. The Three Living and Three Dead

(Photo : Rev. St. A. F. St. John)

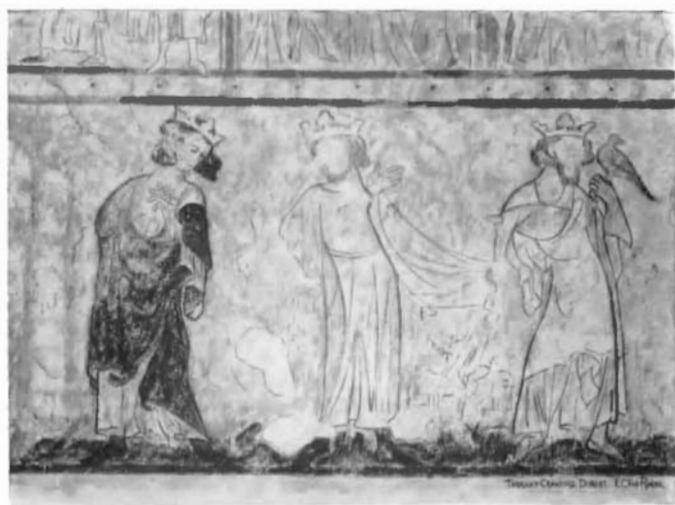


B. The 'Trois vifs et trois morts'. from de Lisle Psalter, Brit. Mus. MS., Arundel 83, folio 127

(Reproduced by kind permission of the Trustees of the Brit. Mus.)



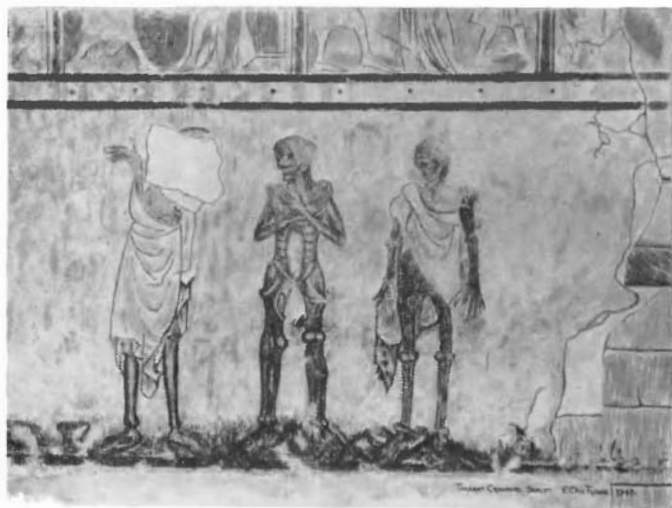
A. Peakirk N. Aisle. The Three Living Kings, part of the three living and three dead subject



C. Tarrant Crawford, Dorset. Painting on S. Wall of Nave : the Three Living Kings



B. Peakirk N. Aisle. The Three Dead (one destroyed)



D. Tarrant Crawford, Dorset. Painting on S. Wall of Nave : the Three Dead



B. New College Chapel, Oxford.
Misericorde

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H.M. Stationery Office*



background of the Kings, indicative of the pleasures and beauties of life, the other side of the picture reveals every emblem of decay and mortality. Worms, slugs and other creatures feed on the actual decaying corpses, while in the background are beetles, ? lice, a newt or lizard, a small dragon and other unpleasant creatures. The unique feature is the representation of numerous moths and butterflies with fat red bodies, and black wings and antennae. The moth of course is a Biblical symbol of corruption. But Dr. T. Marmion in a letter to me makes the interesting suggestion that they might be taken for 'plague heralds'. He says: 'Plague . . . was endemic in England in the early 14th century, and such increase of insects was a common literary impendment of forthcoming plague; though not a pictorial one'. True it is that the Church was ready to seize upon the mortality of plague, and the Black Death in particular, to teach the grim lesson underlined in this subject. The insistence on this feature of decay, and the various other differences from the MS. Arundel 83 illumination suggest that these church paintings had become merely visual or pictorial, rather than an illustration of a definite poem or literary source, though the teaching of the story remains the same, and abundantly clear.

The dating of this fine example of the Morality of the Trois Vifs et Trois Morts presents some difficulty. Although the same border appears as in the Passion Cycle, there are other features which suggest that in fact this painting may be somewhat later than the other set. The elaborate patterning of the costumes, and the free and rather spindly form of the scroll certainly give an impression of date nearer the middle of the 14th century, though the features do not seem so advanced. The possibility of a repainting, or touching-up, cannot be entirely overlooked.

There is much painting in the aisle west of this subject. Much of it is of a fragmentary nature, and there is a good deal of post-Reformation work.

The best preserved subject belongs to the early period again, and is over the north door.

Subject 6. A Warning to Gossips and Scandalmongers. (Pl. XXXIXc).

This is an admirable example of another 'warning' picture—a warning against the sin of Scandalmongering or Idle Gossip. Two women are seated on a bench, their heads close together. The figure on the right wears a white head-veil and a black gown over a white garment. One hand is thrust into a little pocket or opening in the front, and may be compared with a similar feature in a painting of the Virgin and St. Anne in Corby Church, Lincs.,¹ datable in the immediate neighbourhood of 1320. Her companion also has a white head-veil, outlined in red, and a long white cloak or gown, over a red-black garment,

¹ E. Clive Rouse, 'Wall Paintings in the Church of St. John the Evangelist, Corby,

Lincs.', in *Arch. Journ.* (1945), c, 152 (Pl. III).

the sleeves of which protrude. Her hands are spread in the attitude of graphic description. A red-striped, hairy devil stands behind them, one foot on each of their shoulders, and he presses their heads together with a nasty two-pronged claw on each. The creature has unpleasant hooks or claws on its elbows, and black, bat-like wings.

Examples of this subject are quite well known : and the sin of gossip and idle chatter, particularly in church, was a matter of frequent comment by the harassed medieval preacher.¹ Dr. Christopher Woodforde has kindly drawn my attention to an example in wall painting of the subject at Little Melton, Norfolk, where two women sit on a bench or long stool. In this case there is an attendant devil behind each. A misericord in New College Chapel, Oxford (Pl. XXXIXB) has a representation of the subject,² and Bond³ mentions a misericord at Ely where 'a man and a woman are seated together, presumably in church : he has a missal on his knee, she has a rosary : but they are attending neither to the one nor the other : their minds are filled with bad thoughts, and the Evil one has got them in his grasp. . . . A picture in Notre Dame de Recouvrance, Brest, portrays the Devil noting down the idle words of two women who are gossiping during Mass'.

Near this scene are many fragments of elaborate post-Reformation text frames, and a portion of a 15th-century brocade pattern.

West of the door is part of the frame of another early series subject, the frame consisting of conjoined, curved, four-pointed stars. This runs beneath the only other identifiable subject,

Subject 7. St. Christopher II

This is extremely fragmentary and largely concealed by the organ, but its identification is quite certain: When the nave series was damaged by structural changes, the St. Christopher there ceased to be visible : so he was replaced by an even larger figure west of the north door, which would still be visible from the south entrance. The remains consist of a grey cloak with red lines and a pink under-tunic. The sleeve was lined in red and hangs in elaborate folds. The staff can be seen with an eel (?) coiled about it near the base, and other features. The saint has had an elaborate, curled beard and long hair, and a highly decorated halo. East of the staff are fragments in black, evidently part of an elaborate scene. Its date is probably the second half of the 15th century.

CHANCEL

In conclusion, mention should be made, for the sake of completeness, of some very meagre evidences of painting in the chancel. Immediately east of the chancel arch on the north side there are traces of double-line

¹ See G. R. Owst, *Preaching in Medieval England*, 176-7. Also *Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England*, 386-7.

² See R.C.H.M. *Oxford City*, Pl. CLV. The

treatment is very similar to Peakirk, but the two figures are shown sitting in a pew.

³ *Misericords*, 166.

masonry pattern, presumably of the late 12th or early 13th century, the lines following closely the actual masonry joints.

On a section of wall just west of the vestry door there is evidence of a painting: but the remains are too fragmentary even to give a clue as to its nature or date.

It has not been possible to find any very close stylistic parallel to these paintings either in other wall paintings or in manuscripts, to suggest their precise provenance or school. But a manuscript in the Bodleian Library, Bodl. MS. Barlow 22, has some resemblances. It is perhaps significant that this manuscript is of early 14th-century date and is ascribed to Peterborough, 7 miles from Peakirk.¹ On folios 12, 13v, and 14 (Pls. XXXIVB, XXXVI) is a Passion series of illuminations in twelve scenes. Similar, though by no means identical, arrangement and details to the Peakirk cycle are to be observed in the Scourging, Carrying the Cross, where the leading figure points upward, the Crucifixion, which has Longinus pointing to his eye, while the other figure offers the vinegar, in the Deposition, the Entombment, and *Noli me tangere*. The cross is very narrow as at Peakirk. The Resurrection lacks the angels on the ends of the tomb. The Harrowing of Hell is omitted, but the Incredulity of St. Thomas and the Ascension are included. The wavy border with spots, and the square, ornamented corners is also found in this MS. as in the south aisle subject. All one can say is that it is probable that the artist of the Peakirk wall paintings was familiar with Peterborough work, if not actually of that school.

The whole interior now forms a very good example of a considerable part of a typical medieval scheme of 'decorative teaching', the *Biblia Pauperum* as it were, on the walls of the average English village church. This has a combination of subjects which seems in a large degree peculiar to this country, namely, representations of the Bible narrative; the Lives of the Saints, as often as not based on the Golden Legend Version: and a series of Moral Stories, or 'warning' pictures.

Finally, it may be stated that the only 'restoration' indulged in was to carry the framing borders and divisions of the Passion scenes across the very heavy new plaster patches so as to gain a sense of continuity. The actual subject-matter is left untouched in every case, plaster repairs merely being toned down so as not to distract the eye.

A set of annotated photographs of my measured copies is available for reference in the church. Photographs of the church and paintings have been taken by the Rector, the Rev. St. A. F. St. John and by Miss D. Prentice, one of the church officials, whose help, energy and enthusiasm throughout the course of my work are gratefully acknowledged.

¹ See Eric G. Millar, *English Illuminated MSS. of the 14th and 15th century*, 10, 50, and Pls. XXII-III. It is a Benedictine Psalter

from Peterborough Abbey where it belonged to Brother Walter de Rouceby whose obit in the calendar is dated May 4th, 1341.