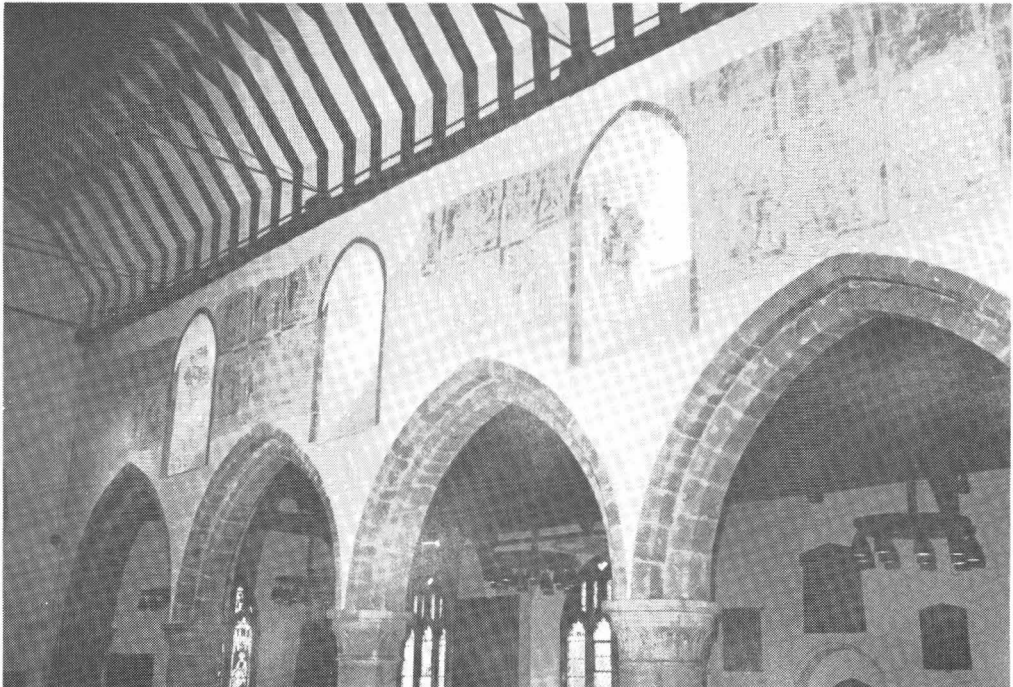


I. BATTLE. North nave arcade, looking East. (All plates by Mr. Ralph Wood).



II. BATTLE. North nave arcade, looking West.



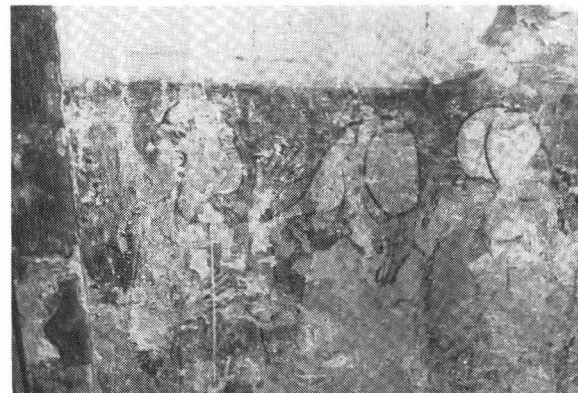
III. BATTLE. North wall of nave, East end. Procession of the Blessed, part of a Doom.



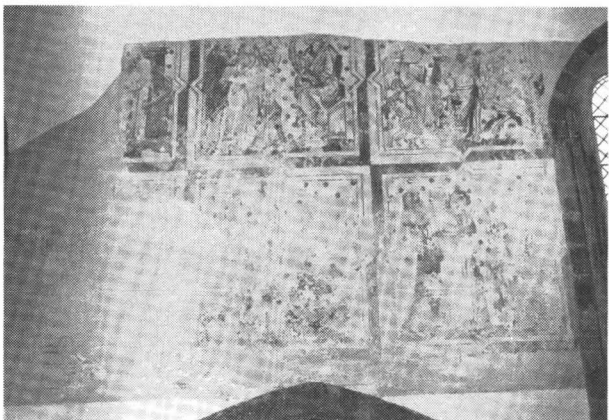
IV. BATTLE. North wall of nave, East end. Procession of the Blessed, part of a Doom.



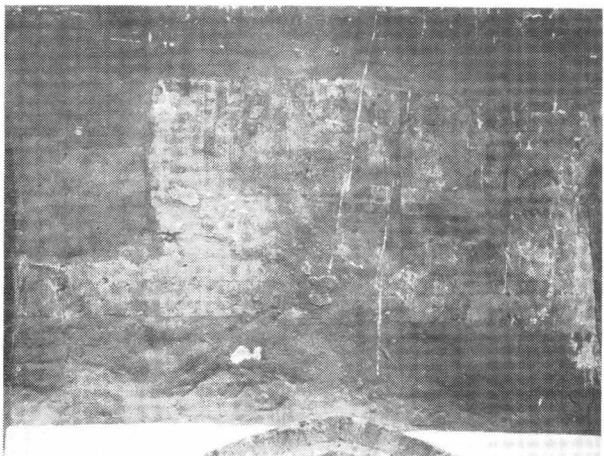
V. BATTLE. North wall of nave, East end. Procession of the Blessed, part of a Doom.



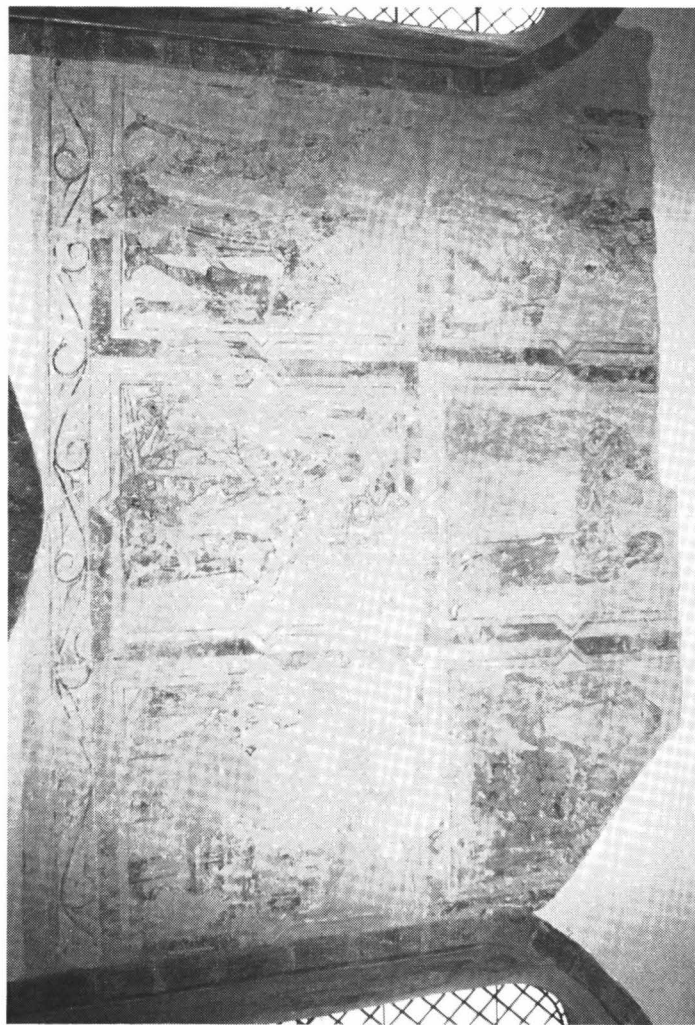
VI. BATTLE. North wall of nave, East end. Procession of the Blessed, part of a Doom.



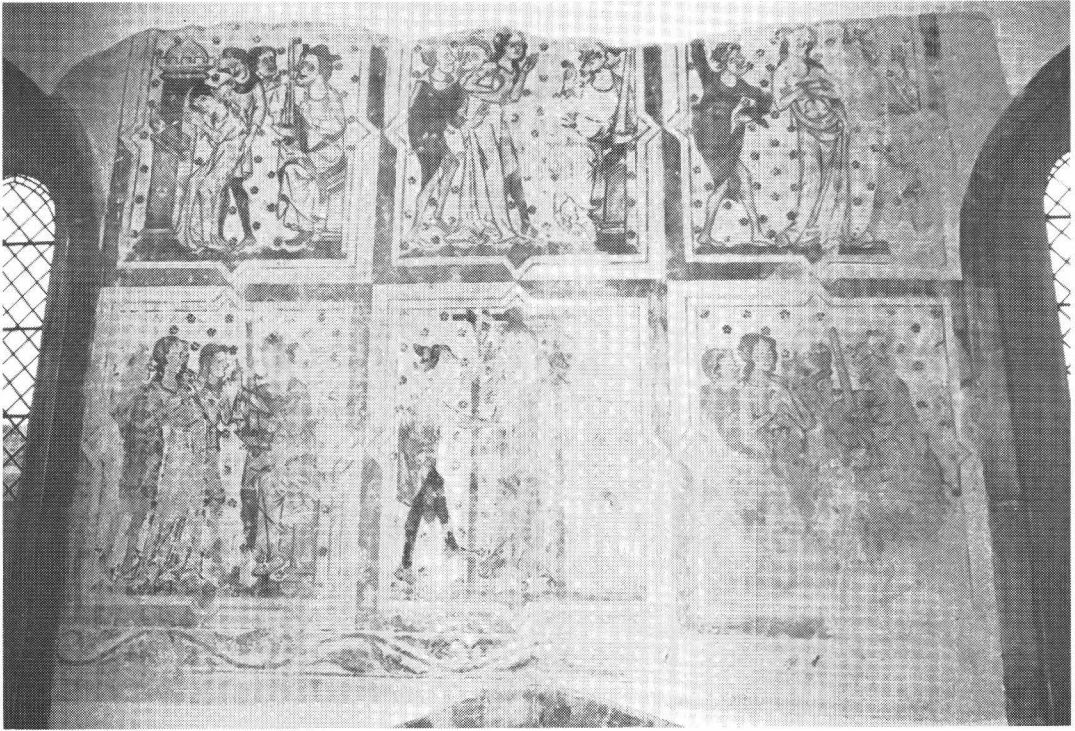
VIII. BATTLE. Above North nave arcade. Life of St. Margaret of Antioch. Scenes 4, 5 and 6 (upper) right to left. Scenes 19, 20, 21 (lower) left to right. Compare this with Plate IX, the same area before treatment.



IX. BATTLE. Above North nave arcade, bay 3 before treatment. Compare with Plate VIII, the same area after conservation.



VII. BATTLE. Above North nave arcade. Life of St. Margaret of Antioch. Scenes 1, 2 and 3 (upper) right to left. Scenes 22, 23, 24 (lower) left to right.



X. BATTLE. Above North nave arcade. Life of St. Margaret of Antioch. Scenes 7, 8 and 9 (upper) right to left. Scenes 16, 17 and 18 (lower) left to right.



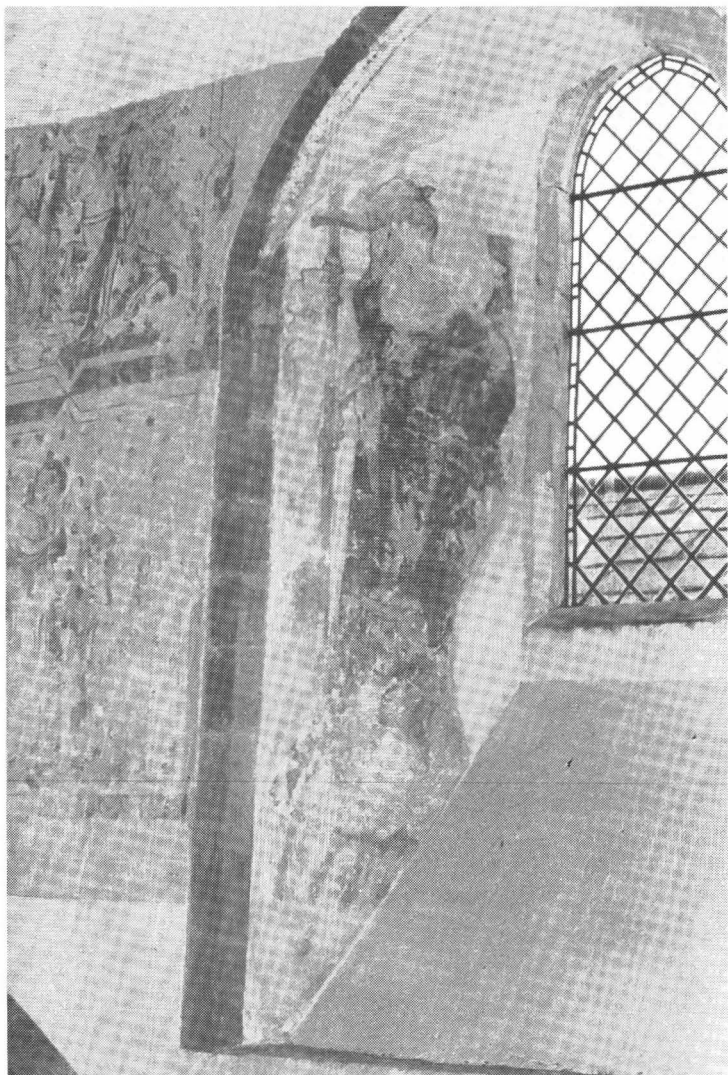
XI. BATTLE. Above North nave arcade. Life of St. Margaret of Antioch. West end, damage by former West gallery. Scenes 10, 11 and 12 (upper) right to left. Scenes 13, 14 and 15 (lower) left to right.



XIIa. BATTLE. North wall of nave, West clerestory window, West splay. Moses.



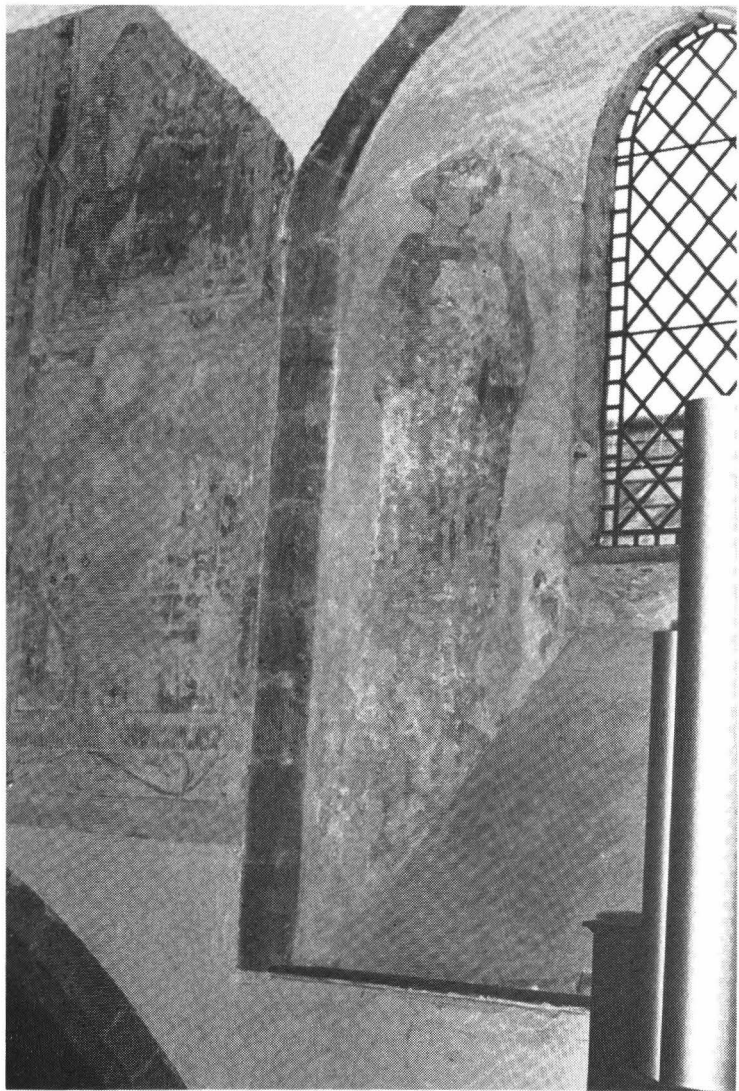
XIIb. BATTLE. North wall of nave, West clerestory window, East splay. ? St. John Evangelist.



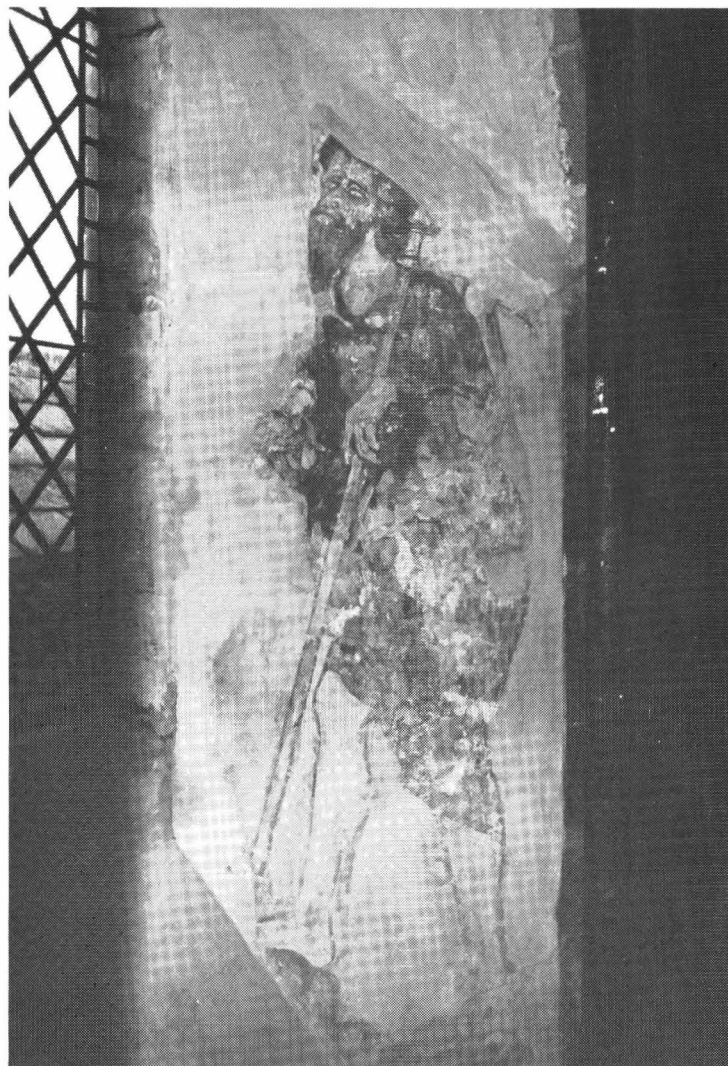
XIIIa. BATTLE. North wall of nave, third clerestory window from West, West splay. Unidentified figure.



XIIIb. BATTLE. North wall of nave, third clerestory window from West, East splay. Unidentified figure.



XIVa. BATTLE. North wall of nave, Easternmost clerestory window,
West splay. Unidentified figure.



XIVb. BATTLE. North wall of nave, Easternmost clerestory window,
East splay. ? St. John Baptist.

WALL PAINTINGS IN ST. MARY'S CHURCH, BATTLE

by *E. Clive Rouse, M.B.E., F.S.A.*

GENERAL

As long ago as 1845 extensive remains of wall painting were disclosed in the parish church of St. Mary, Battle; some further discoveries were subsequently made and briefly reported.¹ A book containing watercolour sketches with a description was produced; and by far the most extensive account was that published in the *B.A.A. Journal*, Vol. 2 of 1847 by J. G. Waller, reproducing many of the drawings by Mr. W. H. Brooke of Hastings.

It is surprising that in view of the extent and importance of the paintings they have received virtually no notice elsewhere, and certainly not by Tristram or Caiger Smith.² Beyond the sketches and records mentioned above, no steps seem to have been taken for conservation or analysis. Some were white-washed over again; and many others have since been destroyed. Since 1845 the walls have been regularly brushed down, and scraped by builders' ladders, so that it is a miracle that anything survives. Indeed, the North wall paintings were so obscure that virtually nothing could be seen from the ground, and there was a move to limewash the whole area. (Plate IX should be compared with plate VIII; the same area before and after cleaning and conservation).

In 1952 my attention was drawn to the paintings by R. H. D'Elboux, who asked me to comment on W. H. Brooke's drawings. The next step was a request from Mr. J. L. Denman, then the Church Architect, to inspect the paintings. This I did in 1959 and prepared a full report. It took until 1973 before anything further transpired; I paid a second visit with my senior Assistant, Miss Ann Ballantyne, when a close inspection and tests were possible from ladders. This proved, as I had already stated, that much of the paintings survived, areas still remained to be uncovered, that they were of exceptional quality, and that I believed that much of the nineteenth century identifications to be erroneous.

The Church Architect was now Mr. Ralph D. Wood, and he has been of the greatest practical assistance ever since. Grants were eventually obtained from the Pilgrim Trust, via the Council for Places of Worship, and the Leach Trust, without whose generous help the work could not have been carried through.

Work was actually started at the East end of the North Nave wall in the early autumn of 1976, and continued for varying periods in each year, working westwards, and was completed in 1978. All my three Assistants, Miss Ann Ballantyne (now Mrs. J. Murrell), Miss Anna Hulbert and Miss Madeleine Katkov worked on the paintings at various times, and their skill, patience and hard work, sometimes under difficult conditions, has been admirable.

¹ Keyser, C. E. *List of Buildings having Mural Decorations*, 1883, 21. Wall, J. C. *Medieval Wall Paintings*, N. D. 148, 205. *Arch. Journal* V, 69. *B.A.A. Journ.* ii, 141. *The Builder*, 1864, 733. *Arch. Journ.* XXXIV, 278.

² E. W. Tristram, *English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century*, 1955. A. Caiger-Smith, *English Medieval Mural Paintings*, 1963. They even escaped the notice of the ubiquitous and observant Pevsner in his Sussex volume of *The Buildings of England*, pp. 407-8, 1965.

THE PAINTINGS

In order to complete the picture of the medieval decoration of Battle Church one should perhaps briefly list the destroyed paintings.

1. *EAST WALL OF NAVE, ABOVE CHANCEL ARCH*

This wall has been entirely replastered, the paintings destroyed, and the tie-beam and braced king-post removed. This was due to repairs to settlement cracks, and the reconstruction of the roof in the late nineteenth century.

- (a) At the top was a representation of the Three Living and Three Dead. This seems to have been correctly identified and reasonably accurately recorded.
- (b) The central zone of the wall below this was clearly part of the Doom or Last Judgment. There was probably a central figure of Christ in Majesty, destroyed even in Brooke's time by a Royal Arms of Charles II. Flanking this was a series of figures apparently in canopied niches, possibly the Apostles, headed by the Virgin on the North, and John Baptist on the South, perhaps with saints. Brooke found traces of inscriptions here which might relate either to the upper or lower rows. The much contracted Latin seems to ask the intervention of the Saints and Martyrs in glory with thanks to Our Lord and the Virgin, and including St. Nicholas, *St. Margaret* and the Apostles and Virgin Martyrs.
- (c) The lower zone or row contained more figures, and both these are continued on the North wall. They appear to be a procession of the Blessed, to be received into the Heavenly Jerusalem.
- (d) The small spandrels at the base of the arch may well have contained a limited representation of the General Resurrection.

2. *CHANCEL*

- (a) Brooke records some single-line masonry pattern, a small fragment of which I saw on my first inspection.
- (b) On the South wall is a considerable area of painting, some of which still survives but has not been cleaned or treated. Brooke records this, but could not identify it, suggesting only a Baptism or Confirmation—unlikely in this position and in isolation.

3. *NAVE*

The most extensive paintings are found here, on the whole of the North wall above the arcade and in the clerestory window splays.

- (a) Brooke records painting on the South return wall, where one would expect a continuation of the Doom; and on this side Hell is usually represented. I found isolated traces of painting here, just enough to prove the former existence of subject-matter. But insufficient to identify or justify elaborate uncovering and conservation.

The North wall has the most important survival of painting; and the complete scheme can now be identified. (Plates I and II).

- (b) At the East End, on the return wall adjoining the chancel arch, Brooke's findings were confirmed, but a slightly different interpretation must be placed on the scene. The former rood loft door (now blocked) is here; and the painting is between it and the first clerestory window. It is in two zones, corresponding to the recorded painting formerly above the

chancel arch. The upper has six or seven figures in canopied niches, of which little survives. Below, there is a lengthy procession of figures moving eastwards—the Blessed about to be received by St. Peter into the Heavenly Jerusalem. They were formerly described as 'female saints.' There is a censuring angel at the head, followed in strict order of precedence by a King, an Archbishop, a Bishop or Abbot, a Priest, a Clerk, a Queen, Unidentified, two Peasants or Laymen, the rear being brought up by another Priest or Monk. (Plates IV to VI). It is unfortunate that the new organ pipes have been placed here, now largely obscuring the subject, and rendering conservation extremely difficult.

4. *LIFE OF ST. MARGARET*

The rest of the wall, between the clerestory windows is occupied by a life of St. Margaret of Antioch in 24 scenes, there being six compartments in two zones or tiers in each section, not a Passion Cycle of our Lord and other scenes, as first identified by Waller and Brooke. The choice of this Saint for such prominence is somewhat curious. The Parish Church of Battle is dedicated to St. Mary, and it is possible that there has been a change of dedication. Arnold-Foster lists 256 dedications to St. Margaret, plus 29 double dedications or others,³ so that she is one of the most numerous. The scenes are contained in framed compartments with a counterchanged motif, and scrollwork at the base. The tops of most of the scenes have been damaged or destroyed by roof repairs in the last century.

In the clerestory window splays are almost lifesize single figures, facing each other in pairs. There were originally eight, but two have been destroyed by water entry and plaster failure. They will be considered separately.

The story of St. Margaret is to be read from East to West in the upper tier, returning West to East in the lower, so that scene 1 is above scene 24. The scenes are shown in simplified diagrammatic form in Figs. 1 to 4.

The version follows closely that given in the *Golden Legend*—the *Legenda Aurea*, a collection of lives of the Saints compiled by Jacobus de Voragine, which became current in manuscript form and the popular basis for much wall painting subject-matter from the mid thirteenth century on. Caxton's translation of 1483 has the legend in Vol. 4, pp. 66-72, published by J. M. Dent in 7 volumes, Temple Classics series, 1900. A summary of the scenes is as follows:

1. Birth of the Saint.
2. She is handed over to her Christian Nurse.
3. The Provost Olybrius and an attendant riding espy the Saint. (Plate VII).
4. These two approach her sitting spinning with a distaff among sheep. (Plate VIII).
5. The Saint, seized by two evil attendants disputes before the Provost, on throne to right (Plate VIII).

From now on the scenes tend to be repetitive, alternating with her appearances before the Provost to dispute or argue with him, and her imprisonments and tortures. The Provost is represented in the same way throughout, with crown, crossed legs, sword and accusing finger, on a throne, usually on the right.

6. The Saint in prison; she leans out of a tower on right. (Left side damaged). (Plate VIII).

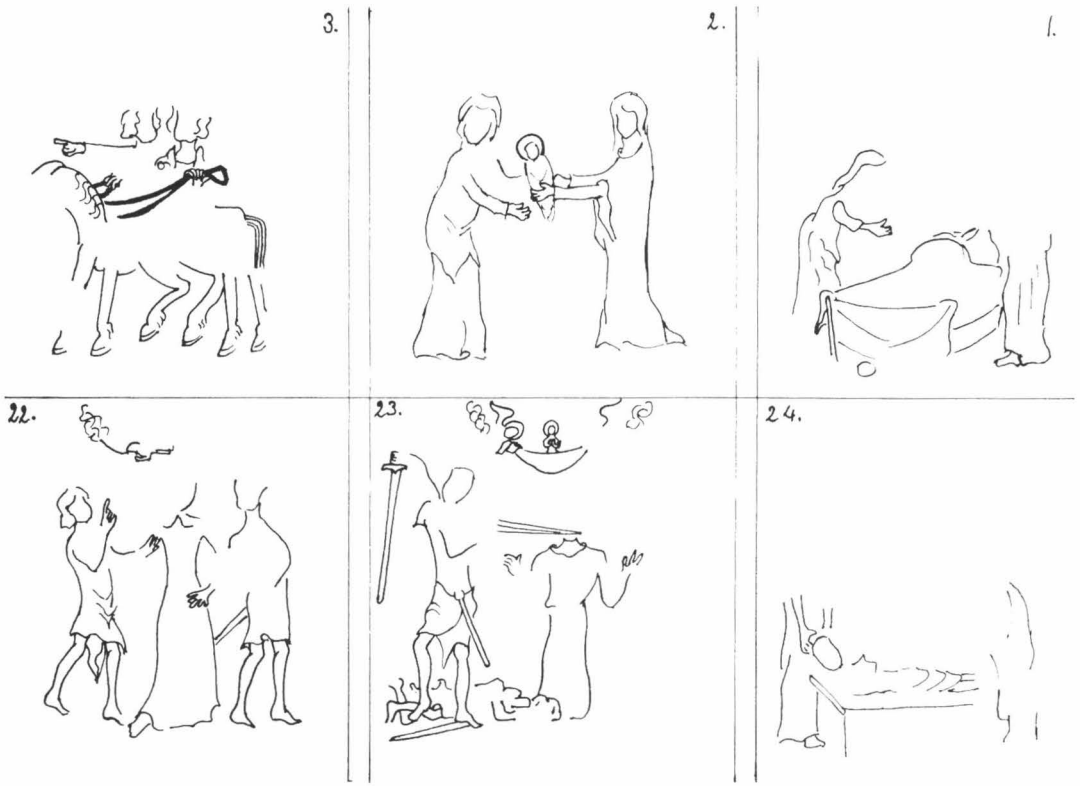


Fig. 1. Diagrammatic key to the St. Margaret series (Human figures are about 2ft. 6in. high).



Fig. 3. Diagrammatic key to the St. Margaret series.



Fig. 2. Diagrammatic key to the St. Margaret series.

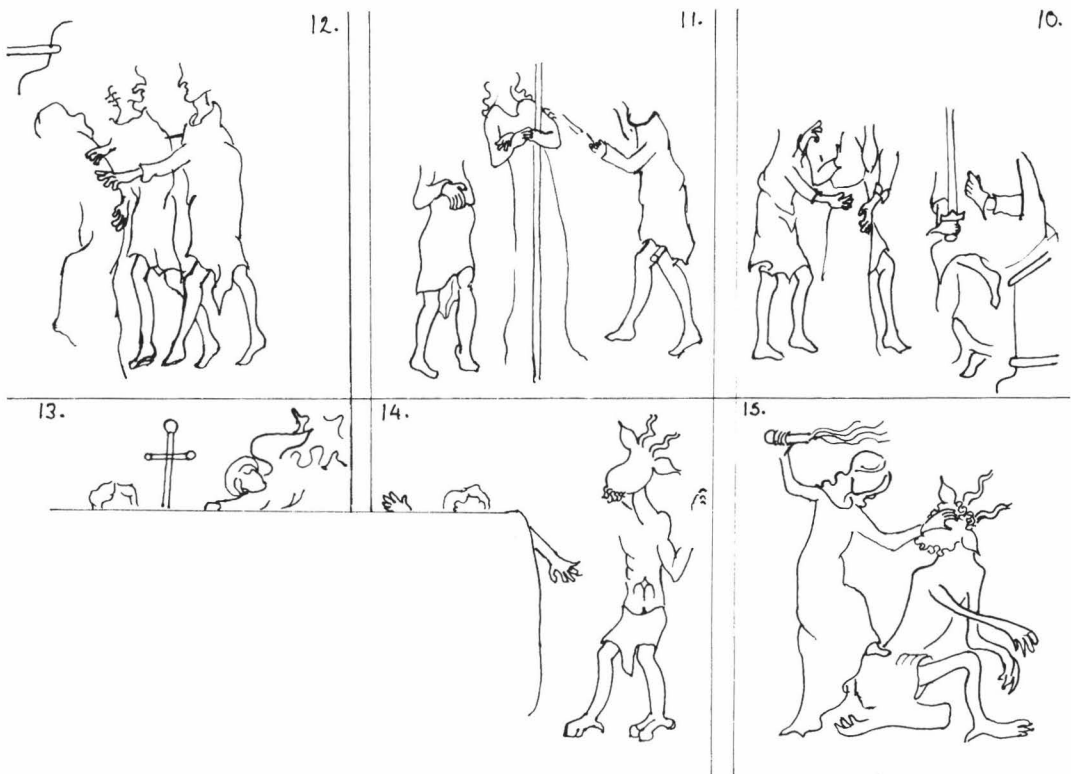


Fig. 4. Diagrammatic key to the St. Margaret series.

7. The Saint, in centre, stripped to the waist, hands bound before her, flanked by two evil tormentors? scourging her. (Plate X).
8. The Saint in centre being man-handled by two torturers disputes further with the Provost on the right. (Plate X).
9. The throned Provost again on right, condemns the Saint to prison once more; she is being pushed into the tower again by two torturers one of whom is speaking to the Provost, crossed legs, sword in hand. (Plate X).
10. This and the following two scenes are damaged at the top. Much as in scene 9, the Saint, her right hand raised, between two torturers who man-handle her, again before the Provost. (Plate XI).
11. The Saint further tormented: first man on right exposes himself to the Saint, and holds a rope or whip extending to St. Margaret's left shoulder. She has wrists crossed (? tied) standing behind a stake at the base of which coals are heaped. (Plate XI).
12. Two men conversing as they push the Saint back into prison once again. (Plate XI).
13. All but top fraction destroyed by former gallery. This was the scene of the bursting of the dragon's (the Devil's) belly and the Saint emerging unharmed holding a cross, the top of which is preserved, a guardian angel flies down, blessing, on the right.
14. The Saint admonishes the Devil. (Plate XI).
15. The Saint chastises the Devil having overcome him. (The last two scenes are the only ones accurately drawn in the old account, probably because they were visible at close quarters from the former West gallery). (Plate XI).
16. The Saint, both hands raised in argument, between the two guards, again before the Provost on right, sword in one hand, the other raised in judgment ordering further tortures. (Plate X).
17. The Saint tied by her hair to a gibbet, again attended by the two evil tormentors. (Damaged by entry of water). (Plate X).
18. The Saint, leaning back, her right hand held by one of the guards behind her, the Provost with sword on the right as usual. (Very badly damaged by entry of water). (Plate X).
19. (Almost totally destroyed by damp and plaster failure). (Plate VIII).
20. (Badly damaged). Man in green robe, yellow hose and black shoes, similar to executioner in scene 23. Confused mass at his feet, including at least 4 heads. This probably refers to the miracle of five thousand being converted by the Saint, and all beheaded at the Provost's orders. (Plate VIII).
21. The Saint again held between two torturers, with one hand raised and finger pointing to heaven, the Provost with crossed legs and sword hand raised and finger pointing condemning her to death. (Plate VIII).
22. The Saint led to execution by two tormentors, the Hand of God above. (Plate VII).
23. Beheaded by Malchus, who falls dead with the sword at her feet. Her Soul carried to heaven in a napkin by an angel. (Plate VII).
24. Burial of the Saint. (Plate VII).

DISCUSSION

The only other extensive series in wall painting of the Life of St. Margaret is on the South wall at Tarrant Crawford, Dorset, though individual scenes are of frequent occurrence, i.e. at Risby, Gloucester Cathedral, Hartley Wintney, etc., etc. The favourite scenes were the breaking of the dragon's belly and the chastising of the dragon by the Saint, often shown holding him captive by her girdle. The breaking of the dragon's belly accounts for the symbolical reason for St. Margaret being invoked by women in child-birth. The Caxton version is as follows: while she was in prison she prayed that the Devil that was tempting her to yield to the Provost's will and forsake her Christian principles would be shown to her in bodily form. "And then appeared a horrible great dragon and assailed her and would have devoured her, and in another place it is said that he swallowed her into his belly, she making the sign of the Cross. And the belly brake asunder, and so she issued out all whole and sound. This swallowing and breaking of the belly of the dragon is said it is apocryphal." This part of the story is shown in scenes 13, 14 and 15, badly damaged by the eighteenth century gallery since removed. But the Cross, and the angel intervening, as well as the admonishing and chastising of the Devil are clear. The whole, of course, must be read as picture language for the overcoming of evil by good.

Other conventions or deliberate exaggerations are well demonstrated in the series. The Saint is a graceful, slender, well-proportioned figure, whereas the torturers, Provost's attendants and executioner are deliberate caricatures, with ugly, brutal features. The Provost himself is always shown cross-legged, crowned, seated on a throne with sword and gauntlet gloves. The crossing of the legs in Medieval iconography was held to be an interruption of the normal flow of life, and could only be indulged in by important people. The pointing finger indicates condemnation. The gauntlet is a sign of rank, and the sword indicates power or cruelty.

It is interesting that the six Easternmost panels (scenes 1-3 and 22-24) have plain backgrounds, whereas all the other scenes have backgrounds powdered with 5-foils. The character of the scroll beneath the panels also changes. On the East it is slender, with trefoil or three-leaved thin ends (Plate VI), whereas towards the West it is heavier and coarser with more palmette-like foliations (Plate VIII).

The framing of scenes in the way that the Battle paintings are shown is frequently found in manuscripts as in Queen Mary's Psalter (Brit. Mus. Royal MS. 2Bvii), the Romsey Psalter in New York, the Barlow Psalter (Bodleian Library MS. Barlow 22, Oxford) and many others.

THE WINDOW SPLAYS

The great figures in the clerestory window-splays present considerably more difficulty, partly owing to their damaged condition. They are clearly meant to be regarded as pairs, since they look towards each other and not towards the nave of the church, on either side of each window. The treatment of figures in pairs, again, is a characteristic feature of many Manuscripts. The most usual are contrasting pairs consisting of a Prophet and an Apostle, each with an inscribed scroll from their works. Such are found in the Peterborough Psalter, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge MS. 53 (formerly E 12) folios 8-18. And in Queen Mary's Psalter there are two folios similar. There are also pairs of Apostles, each holding a scroll with the appropriate sentence from the Apostles' Creed said to have been given them at Pentecost. These are seen in the wall paintings at Longthorpe Tower (Archaeologia Vol. XCVI, 1955, plates III, V, VII, XI).

The Battle figures are not as simple as this. The only one which can be identified with certainty is that in the West splay of the West window, which is clearly Moses, with the characteristic "horns" on his head, and holding a rod or staff with entwined serpent at the top in his right hand, and the tablets of the Law in his left. (Plate XIIa). Opposite him is a younger man with shorter hair and faint, short beard, bare headed and bare-footed and holding a long scroll in one hand to which he points with the other. This is possibly to suggest the Old and the New Testament. Both stand on a yellow and white base representing rough ground. (Plate XIIb).

The pair in the next window to the East have been destroyed by entry of water and plaster failure in the past, only isolated scraps of colour surviving. The following window Eastward has a fine pair of enigmatic figures. That on the West splay appears to be elderly, and holds in his right hand a long cross-headed staff, and a cup or chalice in his left. There appears to be some kind of headdress. (Plate XIIIa). The opposite figure is even more puzzling. There seems to be some sort of hat or headdress with perhaps a torque or wreath. In the right hand is another long staff with some object at an angle at the top. On the other side there may be another, shorter staff, with perhaps a curved top or ribbon. Each has a very long robe or cloak, and the feet are not visible, on the same background. I can offer no suggestion or explanation of these figures. (Plate XIIIb).

The final pair to the East are a little clearer. On the West is a young, short-haired figure, clean-shaven, perhaps with some object in the left hand. This might be St. John Evangelist. (Plate XIVa). The opposite figure is different from the rest, having long, dark shaggy beard and hair, a rough garment to the knees and bare feet and legs. A long staff is carried in the left hand. This suggests St. John Baptist, or possibly St. James Major. (Plate XIVb). There seems to be no coherent scheme or connexion between the figures. None has a halo—indeed St. Margaret throughout her series has no halo either. They are not all Prophets, probably not all Apostles and not all miscellaneous Saints, and to have a seemingly disconnected set like this is most unusual.

TECHNIQUE, PROVENANCE, ETC.

The paintings are of the highest quality, and artistically very fine and consequently of great importance. The drawing and setting-out are skilful and confident. There has been a much wider range of colour than in the normal parish church painting, though, sadly, from a distance of 20ft or more these can hardly be discerned. There has been extensive use of green (a copper salt) and even traces of blue in the large figures as well as the normal red and yellow ochres (iron oxides), black, and lime white.

One should not perhaps be surprised at this in view of the close association with Battle Abbey on the opposite side of the road. The relationship is not unlike that between Westminster Abbey and St. Margaret's parish church, Westminster. The Church was founded by Abbot Ralph (1107-24) probably about 1115 and up to the Reformation was served from the Abbey, enjoying the privileges of Royal Patronage and having a Dean as Incumbent. Little of the early twelfth century church remains: but there were extensions in the late twelfth century, and in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. On stylistic grounds, i.e. the scrolls, costume, background, etc., one would be inclined to place these paintings at the end of the thirteenth or early in the fourteenth century. No close manuscript parallels come to mind; but in view of the Abbey's influence and prestige clearly the best artists and craftsmen were available. It is not known whether Battle Abbey itself had a Scriptorium of any note or reputation from whence manuscripts could be traced: but perhaps artists from Canterbury might have been employed. Other Benedictine houses having notable scriptoria and a

fine artistic tradition are St. Albans and Bury St. Edmunds and, of course, Westminster itself under Royal patronage.

TECHNICAL

It may perhaps be of use to include a note on the technical aspects of conservation of these paintings. They are executed in secco, using mainly earth colours (red and yellow ochres, or oxides of iron) plus lime white and lamp black, and with touches of green and blue already referred to. They are painted direct on to a lime plaster with a lime-putty ground, the vehicle being clear lime-water, and the medium size, perhaps bound with casein. They had, of course, been covered with limewash at the Reformation and had remained obscured until the nineteenth century. They were roughly and not completely uncovered, and a good deal of touching up and overpainting and outlining was done. They were then given some kind of surface fixative which was very difficult to remove, a wide range of solvents having to be used. The Victorian overpainting was removed, the whole area fully uncovered, and the surfaces cleaned. Very many plaster repairs had to be effected, in lime-putty and sand. In some areas the background was stained and blotchy, and a new, toned lime-wash ground was applied in many places to show up the remains of painting. No touching-up of the actual paintings was done. The surrounding walls were treated with a toning limewash. A full photographic record was made at every stage, and for this Mr. Ralph Wood is to be thanked. The diagrammatic key sketch is by Miss Madeleine Katkov. It is a matter of great satisfaction that this remarkable series has been rescued from obscurity and almost certain destruction, and has been identified and interpreted.

The Society is extremely grateful to the Francis Coates Charitable Foundation for a generous grant towards the cost of illustrations in this paper.