

Sussex Archaeological Collections.

MURAL PAINTINGS IN WESTMESTON CHURCH.

BY THE REV. C. H. CAMPION, M.A.

IN the month of September, in the year 1862, some alterations were commenced in the interior of the parish church of Westmeston.

The building, which is dedicated to St. Martin, presents little else than the ordinary features of our smaller Sussex churches. It consists of a nave and chancel, with a south aisle, and a shingled bell turret at the west-end.

The aisle is of later date than the nave and chancel, and is covered with a long sloping roof, which is often used in this district as a defence against the southern gales.

The west-end has a doorway and windows of third pointed style.¹ At the north-west angle of the church, there are buttresses of first pointed style, and two windows of the same period in the chancel; a north doorway to the nave has a semicircular head, and Norman mouldings—a small semicircular arch, constructed of rubble without quoin stones, connecting the nave and chancel, confirmed the evidence of the north doorway, and showed, in spite of windows of various dates, that the fabric is to be referred to the Norman period.

¹ These windows, though the stonework is new, are, in size and shape, a fac-simile of the former ones. The jambs and heads of the old windows were

worked in chalk, a material with which, unfortunately, modern architects seem unable to deal.

A short notice in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1808, informed us that the church had been visited by W. Hamper,² who observed the remains of an ancient painting, the seasons or signs of the Zodiac in roundels on the plaster of the chancel arch; but this notice is so vaguely worded, that we were uncertain whether these paintings were on the face or the soffit of the arch.

We therefore commenced operations, by removing carefully the coats of yellow, white, and blue washes, which had been liberally supplied by successive church-wardens. A very little scraping sufficed to bring to light some texts, in black and white, in the style of the last century, and it afterwards turned out that these were inscribed in considerable numbers on the walls of the church, and had been visible within the memory of some of the older inhabitants of the village.

While we were occupied in examining these texts, some red and yellow borders, and letters, were observed, and another day's work showed that the eastern wall of the nave,³ on both sides of the chancel arch, had been covered with the Belief and the Ten Commandments, on two very large panels from eight to ten feet high, having a text affixed to each.

The subjects of the paintings, which were concealed by these panels, prove that the latter were executed in the early days of the reformation.

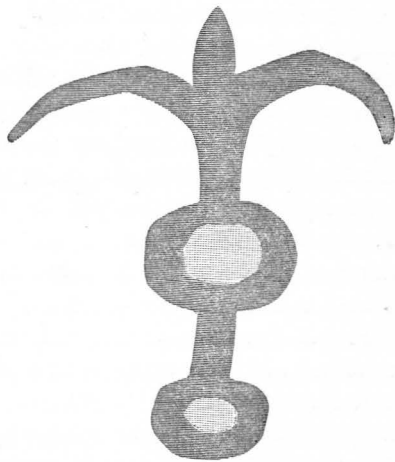
A mural painting, representing our Saviour delivering the keys to St. Peter, would not have been allowed to remain undefaced long after the supremacy had been transferred to the Crown; we may therefore consider the extensive series of texts and ornamental paintings, which were found on this surface of the wall, as representing the style of ornamentation used during the progress of the reformation.

² W. Hamper visited and sketched many of the churches in this district at the close of the last century. The woodcuts taken from his sketches, and published, together with the brief notes which he affixed to them, in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, form a useful record of the state of these churches from sixty to eighty years ago.

³ It is a point of some interest, as bearing on the interpretation of the eighty-second canon, that the belief and commandments were written on the western face of the east wall of the nave, not on the chancel; a position which is certainly the most suitable if they are to be read by the people.

The texts and other ornaments were painted on a coating of haired mortar, about half an inch thick.

The most conspicuous objects in the nave at this period were the large panels on each side of the chancel arch, containing the Belief and the Ten Commandments, rather coarsely painted in red and yellow, with a broad ornamental border. On the soffit of the arch were roundels containing the signs of the Zodiac, in bright red, and underneath these, in a panel on the south side, was a demon with open mouth and large claws, threatening a figure in a shroud, but this was probably painted at an earlier date, and strangely enough left, as not coming under the definition of superstitious paintings, which were ordered to be effaced.⁴ There was a similar panel on the northern soffit of the arch, but the subject was so much injured that it was not possible to decipher it. The walls of the nave were all tinted a rose colour, and on the upper part forming a kind of cornice were figures of this pattern,⁵ from four to six in a row, alternating with texts in squares or oblong borders.



As we were examining these inscriptions, a small piece of the plaster, which it has already been observed was of considerable thickness, fell down, and showed us a head elaborately painted on a surface underneath the Belief.

⁴ I conjecture that this material was used in a spirit of compromise, to satisfy the law against superstitious paintings, and, at the same time, to keep them so far uninjured, that they might be displayed to view when the times permitted it. The paintings bore no mark of having been wilfully injured or defaced, and the covering was one well adapted to preserve them.

⁵ A gentleman who used to attend the

church in the early part of the century, informs me that this painting was to be seen at that period. As the subject is, without doubt, a soul in purgatory, this is a singular instance of a picture of decidedly superstitious tendency, escaping the notice both of reformers and puritans, and only covered with whitewash by a zealous churchwarden during the present century.

Starting anew from this point, three or four days' patient labour⁶ exposed to view a considerable series of mural paintings of Norman date, with which the north and east walls of the Nave were completely covered.

It will be observed by a reference to the general plan of the eastern wall (Plate 1.), that the lower portion of the wall has niches, with pointed arches both on the north and south sides.

These pointed arches, as well as the painting within them, indicate, that this portion of the work is of later date than that on the wall above them. The recesses are about three inches deep, and they were evidently constructed for the purpose of placing side altars at this end of the nave.

While engaged in opening these recesses, we had an opportunity of remarking how indelible are the signs by which the past instructs those who are at the pains of looking for them. The very soot produced by the smoke of the candles which had stood upon these altars many centuries ago, was distinctly visible in three black marks on the upper wall of both niches. (See plate 1.)

The subject within the niche on the south side was the crucifixion. The surface on which it was painted seemed to have been purposely roughened, possibly in order to make the paint adhere better to the plaster. The colours used in this composition differed from those employed in the earlier pictures, and had faded so as to render it difficult to trace some of the figures. (Plate 1.)

The Saviour is hanging on the cross, which is a Latin one; the Dove, enclosed in a circle of green, is on the upper member; two figures faintly outlined stand enclosed in a square, formed by a zig-zag ornament, with a line on each side. The figure to the right of the cross has his hands in the attitude of prayer. Outside this square are two female figures, the one to the left of the cross dressed in blue is no doubt the blessed Virgin, and that on the right has something of the figure and appearance of the Magdalen. The

⁶ It may be useful to persons engaged in uncovering mural paintings, to remark, that the best tool for the purpose is an old table knife, worn thin, and flattened at the end. This can be in-

serted under the thinnest coat of wash, and will usually bring it off in large flakes, without injury to the painting beneath.

colours used in the dresses are blues and greens, the Saviour's body is brown and yellow, which were the prevailing tints, and this confirms the late date I am inclined to assign to this painting. A space beyond the figures was filled in with a dark red scrawl, which seems to bear the character of cinque cento work. (See Plate 1.)

The corresponding niche on the north side has the arch considerably higher than that on the south side, and cuts away the greater part of the subjects above. Old settlements rendered this angle very insecure, and we could only obtain a hasty tracing by candle-light, as it was necessary to fill in the work without delay.

The niche contained two figures in red and yellow copes, of which a portion is given in plate 1.

They were much injured by settlements, and we have no clue to the subjects of the painting.

The evidence which has been adduced shows that these two niches formed no part of the original design, and were inserted long after the paintings above them. The aisle beyond the arcade is also a late addition, and Mr. W. Slater, the architect employed in the restoration of the church, agrees with me in considering it as post-reformation work.

The space enclosed by the walls of the nave, when these deductions are made, was only thirty-one feet long by fifteen broad. The walls were eighteen feet in height, and from their surface must be deducted the chancel arch fourteen feet high, by eight broad.

It was the walls enclosing this space, that the artist of these remarkable mural paintings was required to adorn, and the general arrangement that he adopted is one, which even in the scarred and mutilated state in which we have seen it, was most effective.

The large number of mural paintings found in this neighbourhood has been frequently noticed by Archæologists. There have certainly been many very interesting paintings discovered at Preston, Lindfield, Slaugham, &c., but the present series is unique in this respect, that we are able to trace the general plan on which the artist worked, and that on the two old walls of the Nave, we have his work,

though somewhat faded, still perfect enough to show the style of his ornamentation and the colouring he employed.

The divisions, architectural ornaments, and inscriptions, on which so much of the general effect depends, have all been brought to light, and we can judge what was the appearance of the Nave when fresh from the hands of the artist.

At the height of ten feet from the floor, a line of inscriptions, about three inches in breadth, ran round the whole Nave; the letters white, on a ground the lower half of which is red, the upper yellow. Below this were a series of subjects divided by panels, and other architectural ornaments.⁷ Again, seven feet six inches higher, above the lower line of inscriptions and near the top of the wall, another similar band surmounted an upper series of paintings, and the whole was terminated by the zig-zag pattern shown on the plan at the top of the east wall. (Plate 1.)

This was the method by which unity of colour and design was given to the work. The details and subjects of the paintings were probably affected by local circumstances, and the taste of individuals; but it will be seen that the subjects treated on the east wall are all scriptural.

On the south side of the chancel arch, immediately above the altar niche, a panel contains St. Paul receiving from our Lord a Book, and St. Peter the Keys. The figures are life size; the Saviour is seated on a cushion diapered with a pattern in red; the two apostles stand one on each side of him. The nimbus round the heads of the figures is red in one case, yellow in the two others, and is bounded by a white band. The Saviour has a cross nimbus. His vest is slightly opened in front, and a waved pattern or ornament is visible down one side of the opening, and probably ran round the whole of it; on the under garment, as displayed by the opening, will be seen buttons in sets of three; they are white, and throughout the paintings are found in various parts of the dresses. A bow formed of three red lines runs over the upper part of

⁷ The writer in the *Athenæum*, who stated that these mural paintings followed one another without separation, in the manner of those in the Assisi, was

mistaken. Every subject is divided off by a panel, or some architectural device. This error was corrected in a notice on the subject in our last volume.

ADAT PAULO XPS GLAVES QI OPI PETRO



MRS HEATHCOTE CAMPION DEL

LIBRUM DAT PAULO CHRISSTUS GLAVES QUOQUE PETRO.

J. KING & CO LITH

the picture. The hexameter which surmounted it presents no difficulty, though a few letters are effaced in the first word: (Plate 2.)

RVM DAT PAVLO XPS CLAVES Q. OQ. PETRO.

Librum dat Paulo Xtus claves quoque Petro.

It may be remarked here, that so far as we have succeeded in deciphering them, all the inscriptions are hexameters, some of them leonine verses, and all have reference to the subjects immediately below them.

In the panel above we find the Descent from the Cross. The Cross is beautifully diapered in bright crimson, and has a small white spot at each intersection of the lozenges; the upper part of it cuts the inscription, which has been unfortunately obliterated on one side. The drapery of the Saviour's body is a yellow garment bordered with red, the legs are red and white in alternate stripes, there was therefore no attempt on the part of the artist to imitate the colour of a dead body. The Virgin, wearing the traditional violet dress,⁸ stands on the left of the Cross. Joseph of Arimathea, who receives the dead body, and embraces it in his arms, has a yellow dress; his features are pink, but of a much paler hue than those of the Saviour, and seem to have been intended to throw out the face of our Lord, and to render it the prominent object in the picture. The staves and treads of the ladder are white; the figure on the steps, taking down the Saviour, with the arm and head in very remarkable positions, has a dress of a brownish hue. His cap⁹ bears a striking resemblance to those in the Bayeux tapestry; as, for example, that of the messenger who brings to William the news of Harold's assumption of the crown. The dress has a coloured border of bright pink; these borders¹⁰ recur also in the two figures in the Scourging, and in other parts of these paintings.

⁸ In mediæval art after the crucifixion the blessed Virgin is usually represented as dressed in grey or violet; before that event various colours are used—frequently blue, or blue and white.

⁹ It will be seen here and in the tapestry that the caps are formed of two

shades of brown joined in a slanting line.

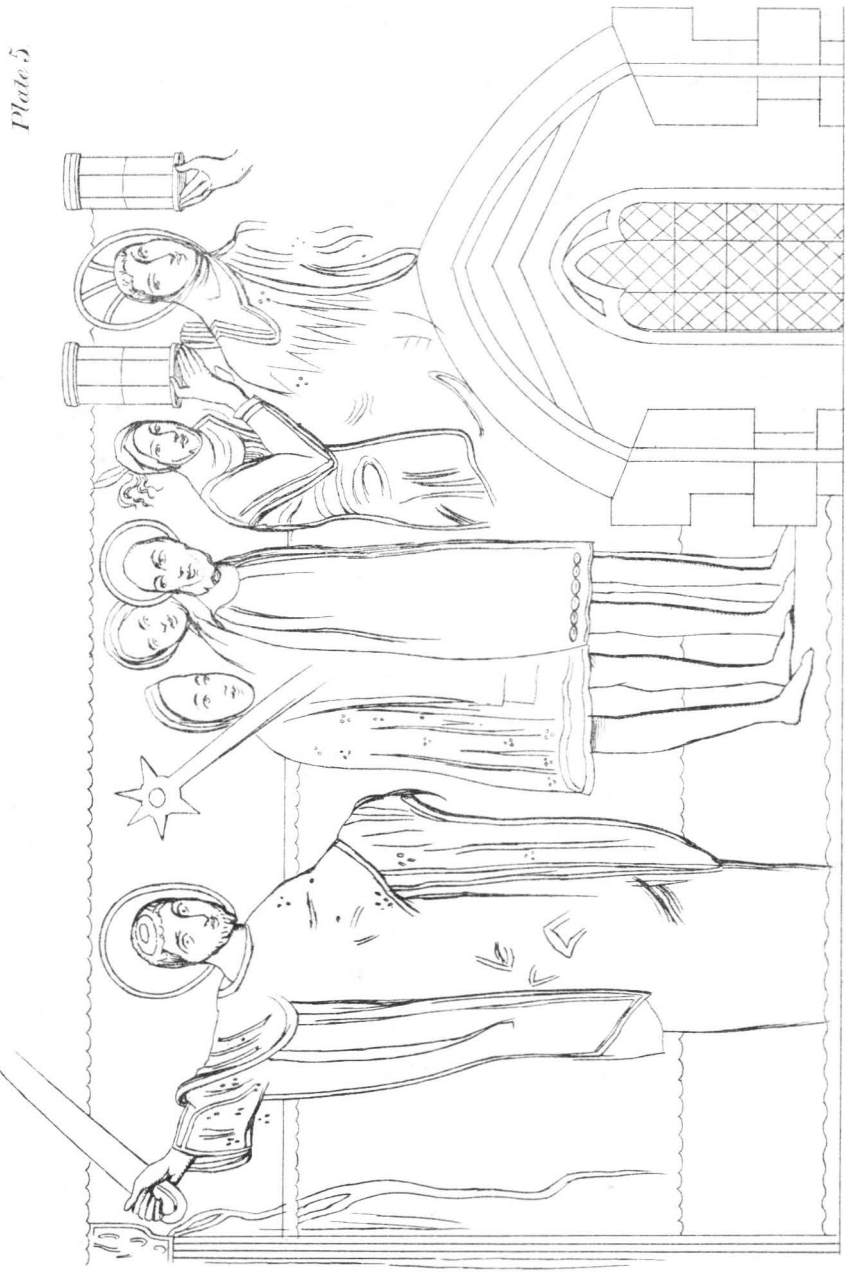
¹⁰ These borders assume a great variety of form; they were probably made of slips of cloth or leather sewn on to the dress, in the manner called by the French *appliqué* work.



ESINAT ORA DONANTOM

ADIT PVLX ES CLAVES ET O PETRE

Wrial Painting: Westmeston Church.
Western Face of the First Wall of Nave.



J. KING & CO. LITH.

M^{rs} HEATHCOTE CAMPTON DEL.

NORTH WALL.—ADORATION OF THE MAGI.

A reference to the sketch of the east wall (Plate 1) will show that the subject on the panel below the scourging has been cut away, leaving only a portion of a head, a bow shaded red and pink, nearly similar to that in the corresponding panel on the opposite side, and part of the hexameter, which a high authority has suggested was when perfect:—

GES NATO DONANT QVI.

Tres reges nato donant tria munera grato.

If this supposition be correct, inasmuch as the hexameter in every case relates to the painting below it, there is considerable difficulty in understanding, how the next subject came into the position which it occupies. It must be borne in mind that the two lines of inscriptions shown on the east wall run also along the north wall, the lower line dividing the paintings at the height of ten feet from the floor.

An inserted window of later date, at the east end of this wall left only some few fragments of the lower picture, and cut away the feet of the upper one, but with the exception of the feet, and lower parts of some of the figures, this upper painting was well preserved; and we are able to offer a lithograph of it for the inspection of our members. It seems evident that the subject represented is the adoration of the Magi. But it is not probable that this should have been represented a second time, within a foot or two of the same subject. This is a nodus which we offer for solution to the Archæologists, only observing that the inscription is defaced with the exception of the letters given above. (Plate 5.)

Two kings kneel one on each side of the Virgin, to whom they are holding up caskets, which cut the inscription above. The star and beam proceeding from it are represented of gigantic size, and in a rude manner, but we are not without examples of similar treatment in paintings of an early date. The figure immediately behind the kneeling one has a nimbus, and probably represents the third king followed by two attendants, but the most puzzling part of this painting is the figure in the act of striking with a sword or weapon, which cuts the inscription. He is dressed in a Dalmatica of a warm yellow colour, with drapery lines in bright red. He has a nimbus round the head and the tonsure of St. Peter—

in the inscription also the word *Petrus* was still undefaced. Why *St. Peter* should be found in this composition is another mystery which we have been unable to solve, and to which it is desirable to call the attention of persons familiar with ancient art. (Plate 5.)

The middle compartment of the upper series of paintings on the north wall was longer than any other in the church, it was separated from the last subjects by a grayish band, with a red heart-shaped ornament upon the upper part of it. The ground was a warm yellow, and a large number of heads were traced upon it. Some of these heads were rolling on the earth, the few of which we were able to obtain copies gave us the idea of a battle or struggle, but owing to old settlements, which had been filled in, we had great difficulty in recovering any portion of the painting, and the inscription is too imperfect to enable us to form any probable conjecture as to the subject. The letters of which tracings could be procured will be found in the last page of this paper.

Underneath this painting, about the middle of the wall, we found in very tolerable preservation the figure with *Datianus* written across it, and *Datiano Regi* on the inscription above. (Plate 6.)

Datian was president of Spain during the reign of *Diocletian* and *Maximian*, his name occurs on a boundary stone¹¹ near *Ebora* (*Evora*) where he is said to have determined the boundaries between the *Pacenses* and *Eborenses*, in *Lusitania*. It is not however for this reason that his portrait would be found on the walls of an English church. But in his office of president it fell to his lot to execute the decrees of *Diocletian* against the Christians, and he did so with the most savage ferocity.

The names of numerous martyrs¹² are recorded as having suffered under his rule; the most celebrated and the one especially venerated in the English church is *St. Vincent*, the deacon

¹¹ OREOLO LOCO SOLITARIO.
NON PROCUL AB EBORA
ETERN. IMPP.
C. AURE. VALER. IO. JOVIO DIOCLETIANO. C.N.
M. AUR. VALER. O. ERCULEO MAXIMIANO. PHS
REL SEMPER AUG.
TERMINUS INTER PACENS. ET EBORENS.
CURANTE P. DATIANO. V. P.
PRESIDE H.H. N.M.Q., EORUM DEVOTISSIMO.

HEINC PACENSES.
In aversa parte
HEINC EBORENSES.

Gruter's Inscriptions.

¹² *Eulalia* of *Merida*, in *Spain*, and *Leocardia*, of *Toledo*, were among the victims of his persecution.



DATI

ANVS

REV. HATHCOTE CAMPBELL DEL.

—CORER WALL.—DAGHER.

and martyr, whose name is found in our own calendar on the 22nd of January.

He was a native of Cæsar Augusta (Saragossa), and Valerius, the bishop of that city, made him his deacon. The acts of his passion have been versified at great length by Prudentius, who was himself born in the same city, a fact to which he testifies in his fourth hymn, Peristephanon, on the eighteen martyrs of Cæsar Augusta.

Noster est, quamvis procul hinc in urbe,
Passus ignotâ dederit sepulcri,
Gloriam victor prope littus altæ.

Forte Sagunti—Hymn 4, Peristephanon.

Following the account of Prudentius¹³ who lived about 50 years after the martyrdom he describes, we learn that Vincent when he was brought before Datian, irritated the president by his contemptuous language, and his insults to the Gods.

Tibi ista prosint numina,
Tu saxa, tu lignum colas,
Tu mortuorum mortuos,

Nos lucis autorem patrem.—Hymn 5, Peristephanon.

The most severe torments were used to the martyr, he was stretched until his limbs were out of joint, and his flesh was then torn with hooks. This is the president's command to the executioners:—

Vinctum retortum brachiis,
Sursum ac deorsum extendite,
Compago donec ossuum
Divulsa membratim crepet;
Posthinc huileis ictibus
Nudate costarum abdita,
Ut per lacunas vulnere
Jecur resectum palpitet.—Hymn 5, Peristephanon.

While these tortures were inflicted on St. Vincent, his

¹³ The acts of the martyrs, an account, that is, of their sufferings, and their behaviour under them, were drawn up soon after their martyrdom; these were read in the churches, as St. Augustin intimates in the following passage from a discourse on Vincent (In festo martyris

Vincenti):—"In passione quæ nobis hodie recitata est, fratres mei, evidenter ostenditur, Judex ferox, Tortor cruentus, Martyr invictus." Sermon 276.—These acts are the groundwork of all the subsequent poems and orations.

face was illuminated with a calm smile, and this immovable aspect struck Datian with such astonishment that he accused the executioners of wilfully sparing the martyr.

Quis vultus iste pro pudor,
Datianus aiebat furens,
Gaudet, Renidet, Provocat,
Tortore tortus acrior.—Hymn 5, Peristephanon.¹⁴

St. Vincent asserted his power of bearing the utmost that his persecutors could inflict upon him. He was again torn with hooks, his body sprinkled with salt, and placed on an iron bed (*grabato*) over a slow fire.

When he found that his efforts were all in vain, Datian ordered him to be confined in a dark cave, used as a prison, which, by a refinement of cruelty, was strewn with sharp pieces of broken pottery.

After a time, the gaoler, to his surprise, observed a light from under the door. He looked in, and saw the prison illuminated with a heavenly radiance, while the fragments of pottery had clothed themselves with a soft and fragrant bed of flowers¹⁵ on which the saint was reposing in a quiet and refreshing slumber;¹⁶ angels waited round him, and comforted him with the assurance that his martyrdom was over, that a calm and painless death should reward his patient endurance and add him to their number.¹⁷ The miracle was

¹⁴ Tum deinde cunctatus diu
Decernit extrema omnia
Igni grabato et lamina
Exerceatur Questio
Hœc ille se ad munera
Gradu citato proripit,
Ipsosque, pernix gaudio,
Pœnæ ministros prævenit.
Ventum ad palestram gloriæ,
Spes certat et crudelitas
Luctamen anceps conserunt,
Hinc martyr, illinc carnifex.
Hymn 5, Peristephanon.

¹⁵ Cernit deinde fragmina
Jam testularum mollibus
Vestire semet floribus
Redolente nectar carcere.

Pruden. Hymn 5, Peristephanon.

¹⁶ This beautiful legend may easily be translated into truth, if we remember that certain exalted states of mind take away the sense of pain.

Let the martyr assure the Christians

who came to visit him that his hard and angular bed seemed to him like a bed of flowers, his dark dungeon like a palace of light, and all is plain; the poets will materialise his emotions, and the orators use the legend as a theme.

¹⁷ Quin et frequentes angeli
Stant ac loquuntur cominus,
Quorum unus, ore augustior,
Compellat his dictis virum,
Exsurge martyr inclyte
Exsurge securus tui,
Exsurge et almis cœtibus,
Noster sodalis addere,
Decursa jam totis tibi
Pœnæ minacis munia,
Pulchrâque mortis exitu
Omnis peracta est passio.
Oh miles invictissime,
Fortissimorum fortior,
Jam te ipsa sæva, et aspera
Tormenta, victorem tremunt.

Pruden. Hymn 5, Peristephanon.

noised through the town; the Christians in Crowds came to visit him, and to dip their garments in his blood. The gaoler himself was converted; Vincent, however, prayed only for death, and soon after falling into a deep slumber, his life passed imperceptibly away. But in the ages of persecution the labours of prefects did not end with the death of the Christians; their remains became the object of a veneration, which in future times, led to the most deplorable results. In order to prevent this devotion, Datian directed that the martyr's body should be exposed in a marsh, as a prey for the wild beasts; while it lay in this spot, a hungry wolf, who came to devour the corpse, was driven away by a crow, who had taken up his station near it;¹⁸ and the body remaining untouched Datian ordered it to be sunk in the sea. It was carried out in a boat and a stone tied to it, but nevertheless the corpse rose to the surface, and floating to the land, was found by two Christians, who interred it.

The fame of Vincent soon spread in the church, and Augustin, in his 276th sermon, testifies that his name was already known and his festival celebrated in all parts of the world (*ubique terrarum*). We may subtract something from this oratorical statement, and yet suppose that it was known and venerated in this country in very early times. The benedictional of St. Athelwold contains a form for his festival.¹⁹

Caythorpe, in Lincolnshire, Ashington, in Somersetshire,

¹⁸ Perhaps both the one and the other were deterred from touching it by the salt which, as has been observed, had been sprinkled on the body of the Saint, and even burnt into his wounds.

The details of Vincent's martyrdom are derived from contemporaries, but in this and many similar cases we may believe the facts to which they testify, without binding ourselves to their opinions of the causes which produced them.

Four of St. Augustine's discourses are on Vincent; the opening of the 274th alludes briefly, but with much oratorical force, to the different acts of his martyrdom.

Vicit in verbis, vicit in pœnis, vicit in confessione, vicit in tribulatione, vicit

exustus ignibus, vicit submersus fluctibus, vicit postremo tortus, vicit mortuus.

The fifth sermon on Vincent, printed in the appendix to the Paris edition of St. Augustin's works, is clearly by a later writer.

¹⁹ *Benedicat nobis dns celorum rector et conditor et det nobis tranquillitâté temporum, salubritatem corporum, salutemque animarum—Amen.*

Tribuatq. nobis frugalitatis gaudium, interveniente beato Vincentio Martyre suo, æternitatis præmium lumen clarissimum sempiternum—Amen.

Concedat nobis suæ pietatis auxilium ut cum cogitatione mens videat, lingua voce proferat, actio non offendat—Amen, Quod ipse Præstare.

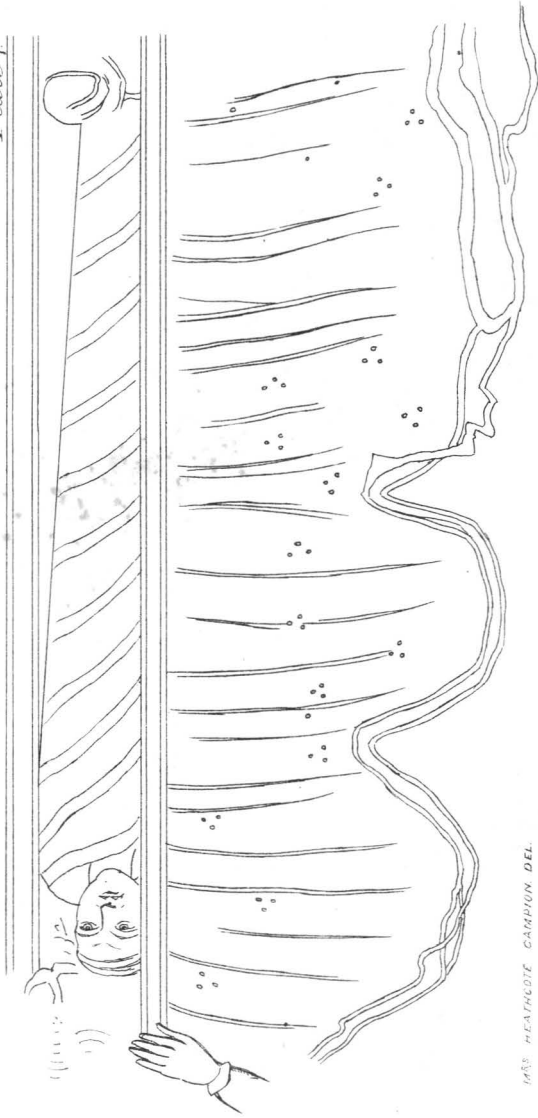
Newnham, in Hertfordshire, and Littlebourne, in Kent, are among the churches dedicated in his name; and the Synod of Worcester prohibited the exercise of any handicraft on the 22nd of January, the day of his death: but for what reason his martyrdom was depicted on these walls must remain an enigma until some fresh evidence can be procured.

With respect to the treatment of the subject, a reference to the plate (No. 6) will show that Datian has a crown on his head, surmounted by three fleurs de lis, and a long sword in his hand. On his left stands a man apparently deprecating the wrath of the Governor. On his right, a high, narrow arch, bounded by two lines of white, and a half-arch on each side, seems to represent a prison. A ring, with a hand in it, shown in the engraving, and a few traces of drapery, were all we could recover of the martyr's figure. A line of pale pink, bounded by white, about three-quarters of an inch broad, and ten feet long, reached from the prison or tower up to the subject above the door. Many conjectures were made respecting this remarkable line; but, after a careful consideration, I am of opinion that it was intended to represent a beam of light. This beam probably proceeded from the seat of the judge, in the painting over the door; and it shows the freedom with which the artist worked, that in this as in other parts of these paintings, the design breaks through the bounds of its own subject, where height or depth are needed to produce some desired effect.

If this conjecture be correct, it enables us to fix the point in Vincent's legend, which the painter has selected for representation. The line of light is that which was sent to illuminate his dungeon; this, however, has been changed from the cavern of Prudentius, and the older writers, to a Norman building of brick-work. Datian is declaring his fixed determination to execute the decrees of the Emperor, and to compel the martyr's obedience, while the gaoler looks on with a mixture of fear and astonishment, which are expressed in his features, and holds his hand up, as if deprecating the anger of the governor.

It would have been interesting to see how the Norman artist treated the flowers sprouting from the fragments of pottery, and whether they were conventional, or those of this

Plate 7

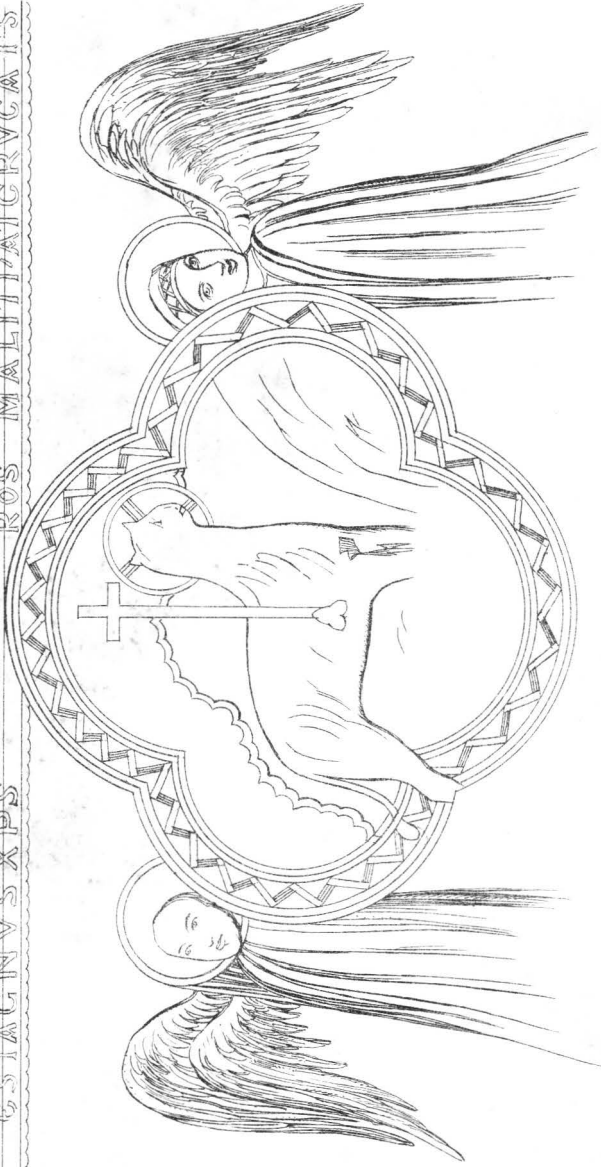


MRS HEATHCOTE CAMPION DEL.

—NORTH WALL. —A BIER.

ESTAGNVS XPS

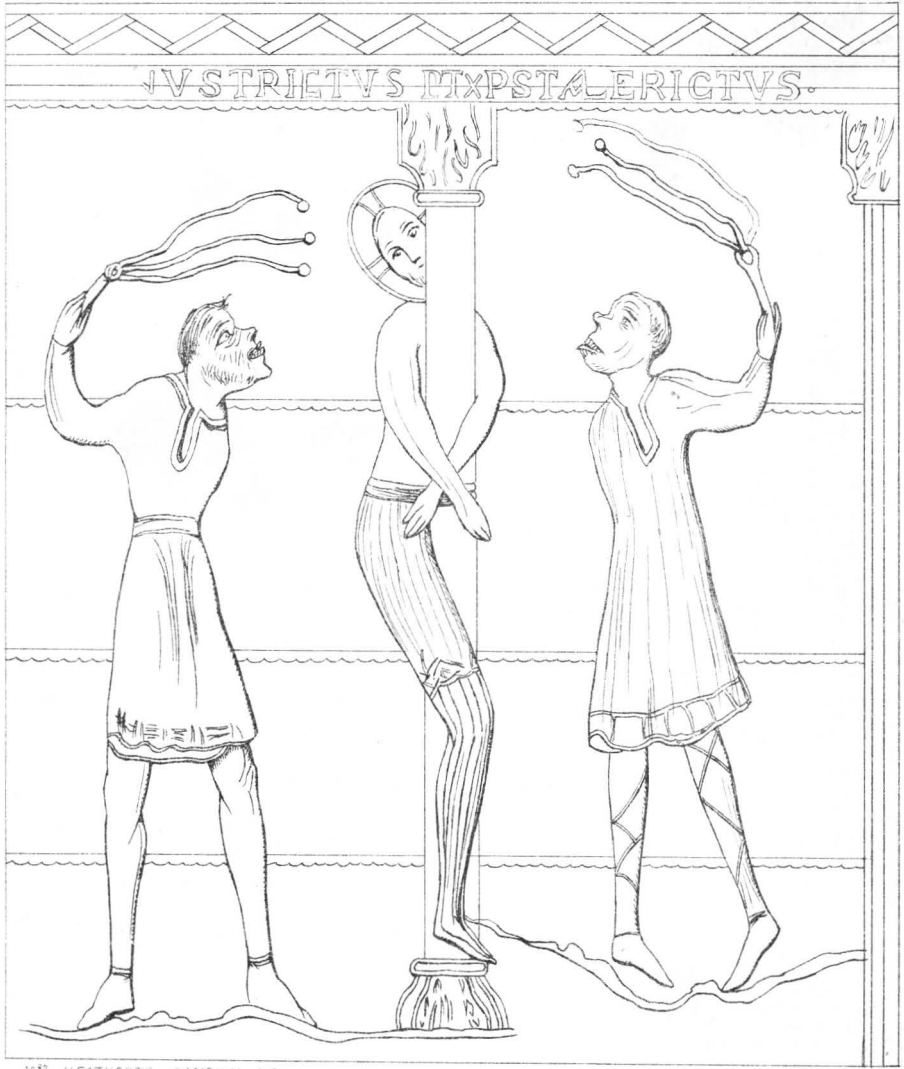
ROS MALITIATGRVCAI'S



N^{OS} HERETICITE CAMPION DEL.

J. HINDS & CO. LITH.

OVER THE BROW OF THE CHANCEL ARCH.



SCOURGING OF CHRIST.

country, but the entire destruction of the lower part of the painting has deprived us of this satisfaction.

The painting at the further end of this wall fitted in over the door, and extended to the western wall of the church. This wall is of perpendicular date, consequently any early paintings which may have been depicted upon it were destroyed. A pair of legs of gigantic size rested, on each side of the small round arch over the door; the upper part of the figure was obliterated, but its situation indicated that these legs formed a part of the figure of Satan, who frequently occupies this position in paintings of the last judgment. The middle portion of the picture was very indistinct, owing to a large settlement, but a tracing of a head was secured, which seemed to be that of the Saviour. On each side men were bearing up the bodies either of the saints or of benefactors to the church, upon biers, one of which is given in plate No. 7.

Several of these biers were found on different parts of this wall. We also observed numerous red lines on a yellow ground reaching down to the floor on the western end of this wall. It was at first supposed that these were flames into which Satan was casting the wicked; but subsequent discoveries shewed that the whole wall down to the floor line was covered with biers, and the red lines were the folds of drapery hanging from them.

With this judgment scene ends the series of Norman paintings discovered on the walls of this church; but it remains to say something on the style, and the date of these early works of art.

It is difficult in the present condition of our knowledge to distinguish the different styles of art which have prevailed in our churches. The artists of Bignor, and other contemporary Roman works, must have had some influence on the people among whom they lived, but of Romano-British or Saxon paintings, we have no remains in our churches. The Norman ecclesiastics, brought in by the Confessor,²⁰ are acknowledged

²⁰ Shortly after the conquest we have frequent notices of pictures as part of the decorations of churches. William of Malmesbury writes thus, of the eastern end of Canterbury Cathedral, re-built by Prior Ernulf, 1076:—"Cantiæ dejectam priorem partem ecclesiæ, quam Lan-

francus ædificaverat, adeo splendida erexit, ut nihil tale possit in Angliâ videri, in vitrearum fenestrarum luce, in marmorei pavimenti nitore, in *diversi coloribus picturis* quæ mirantes oculos trahunt ad fastigia lacunar.—De Gest: Pontif: annal.

to have introduced an improved style of church architecture into this country, and many of our churches may have been rebuilt, or have had a Norman restoration before the conquest. The large number of Sussex churches mentioned in Domesday, and especially in this neighbourhood,²¹ shows that the hand of the church architect had not been idle in the county, and the discoveries here made are one of many proofs that where there were churches there were paintings. The whole weight of evidence tends to show that no sacred edifice was considered complete, until its interior walls were covered with appropriate subjects. These were drawn either from scripture, or from the legends of the saints, but whatever scene may be represented, the treatment is invariably characteristic of the period in which it was executed. The painter made no effort to give an eastern character to the crucifixion, or the scourging; he drew the men, the women, the dresses, the ornaments, and the buildings, which he saw around him. Thus the male figures in these paintings wear the short Norman tunic, shaped like the round frocks of our labourers. The Roman pro-consul Datian is turned into Rex Datianus; he has on his head a crown surmounted with *fleurs de lis*, and carries a long double-handed sword. However defective this treatment may be in an artistic point of view, it offers a vast field for the researches of archæology, for if the date of paintings thus designed can be ascertained, they will necessarily throw great light on the manners and customs of our ancestors.

In the absence of documentary evidence, one of the surest grounds for fixing the date of mural paintings is that supplied by the architectural ornaments which they may contain.

Early monuments, whether of stone or brass, follow closely changes of style in architecture, both in their construction and their ornaments. Paintings, perhaps, from their great facility of execution, still more closely than works of stone or metal. In the paintings we are considering all the buildings are of

²¹ Clatune ibi eccla :
Chemere ibi eccla :
Estreat ibi xi. ecclesiolæ :

(All trace of one of these ecclesiolæ is
apparently lost.)
Pluntune ibi eccla :
Dicelinges ibi eccla.

early Norman date,²² the windows small, the arches high, narrow, and semicircular.

From this internal evidence, we may probably assign to these paintings a date not later than the middle of the 12th century.

It has been already remarked that the treatment of these subjects is not conventional. Even in the person and features of our Lord, though a certain reverence is observed, there is no trace of traditional art. Caravaggio himself could not have adhered more closely to unadorned nature, and in the features of the gaoler, and the executioners, it is impossible not to see that the most repulsive looking objects have been selected, and their portraits transferred to the wall, to express the loathing with which the painter regarded the cruelty of their employments. The dresses are those of the period, the men wear the short Norman tunic, the women a long dress reaching nearly to the ground, and both have coloured borders formed of slips of leather or cloth, at the lower part of the dress; the sleeves are large and open at the wrist, and in some cases have coloured borders, like those round the skirts of their dresses. The attitudes of the figures are frequently forced and unnatural; in this, and many other particulars, they resemble those in the Bayeux tapestry.

The colours used are distempers, and in one or two places there were traces of varnish.²³ The grounds were red and yellow, divided by fine white waved lines. These masses of colour, in which there was no shading or variety of tint, were a conventional method of expressing earth and air, and the figures generally stood on the white lines dividing the two colours.

The work was executed in a very free manner with no outline; slight inaccuracies in the lines belonging to the inscriptions shewed that even in this part of the work all mechanical aids were dispensed with. These letters also

²² Our earliest examples of the pointed arch are found in the choir of Canterbury Cathedral, about 1180, and the round part of the Temple Church, 1185. But Chichester Cathedral shows good Norman work in the restoration of Bishop Seffrid, 1199, and from the great prevalence of Norman work in this county, it was probably one of the last to reject its favourite style.

²³ It is worthy of remark, that whereas the successive coats of yellow, blue, and white wash were all discoloured with green, the paintings underneath were untouched. This shews that the damp is in the air of our churches rather than in their walls. Internally these walls were perfectly dry, but they were covered with green patches on the surface.

were far from uniform in height and size, and seem to have been painted freely by hand, without the aid of diagrams, or of instruments for measuring.

It is not easy to account for the large number of artists who must have been employed, when village churches were painted in this elaborate manner. Probably they came from the great religious houses. Among these communities art found a refuge in the most unsettled periods of our history.

The position of Westmeston, five miles from Lewes, and at the foot of the Downs, then the highway of this part of the county, would lead us to expect that the great Cluniac Priory of that city may have furnished artists, both willing and competent, to decorate the neighbouring churches.

The *valor ecclesiasticus* of Henry VIII. indicates some connection between the parish and the Priory, and the following extract shews that the rector paid a small annual pension to the prior:—

“Westmystn cu capellâ de Chiltyngton, Rob^{tus} Calle, Clicus, Rector, ibidem valet, clare per annum cum ommbz proficuis, et commodit. ultra xxx^s annuatim; sol. priori de Lewes pro pensione annuâ vi^s viii^d.”

Further researches may show other bonds of union besides this six and eightpenny payment, which is certainly not one of an endearing nature.

In conclusion I would desire to impress upon the members of our Sussex Archæological Society the importance of watching carefully all church restorations, lest mural paintings should be destroyed, of which no memorial has been preserved.

Builders and workmen are alike reckless of these invaluable records of the past. The pick is the implement employed for hacking off plaister from old walls, and it is no exaggeration to say that many hundreds of square yards of painting are every year destroyed in this manner.

While the smallest scrap of paper or parchment which can throw light upon the past is treasured up with jealous care, we allow the abundant evidence which the storied walls of our churches would afford to be irretrievably lost.

The paintings on the walls of a few houses, in Pompeii, have supplied us with more information respecting the domestic habits of the Romans than the whole course of Latin literature. What archæological discoveries may we not ex-

pect to make when the walls of our own public buildings render up the evidence they contain; and how can history be more than a meagre record of the doings and sayings of great men, while such important testimony is wanting.

The old paintings in our churches were daily before the eyes of the people; they were the books of the unlearned, and had a vast influence on their modes of thought and belief. To write the history of the ages before the reformation, without estimating the effect of Church paintings on the minds of the people, is much as if we were to describe the religion of our own times without any mention of the bible or the prayer book.

To enable history to present us with a perfect representation of the past, this, and all similar evidence of the thoughts and feelings of our ancestors must be carefully accumulated and preserved. Then may historians hope to accomplish what few have attempted and none have yet satisfactorily performed. They may teach us, not only what the rulers of the nation said and thought, but what was the mind of the people.

INSCRIPTIONS ON THE NORTH WALL FROM WEST TO EAST—

UPPER LINE.

I C V E L ^{six inches} V ^{fragments of two letters} V O ^{space} F R I ^{one letter} O ^{one letter}.
^{ten inches} V V E N ^{one foot} O I V X P S ^{two letters} C I L A ^{space}

Christus

E L V ^{one foot} L C I

These last letters fit in over the adoration of the Magi

T R V S ^{space} A I C V L

Petrus

IN THE LOWER LINE

D A T I A N O R E G I

Datiano Regi

was inscribed over Datian, the remainder we were unable to decipher.

The Committee of the Sussex Archæological Society are indebted to Miss E. Hawes, for numerous tracings of these paintings. And my own thanks are due, to many friends, for assistance in preparing this paper.