

CHARLWOOD CHURCH AND ITS WALL-PAINTINGS.

BY

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THE work of cleaning and applying a preservative to the ancient wall-paintings of Charlwood Church has brought to light some very interesting details, which have either not been observed before, or have not been adequately noticed in the published descriptions in the *Archæological Journal*¹ and the *Collections* of the Surrey Archæological Society.² Having carried out this work of cleaning and preservation between March and August, 1924, when the general repair of the fabric of the Church was carried out under the supervision of Mr. W. A. Forsyth, F.R.I.B.A., and myself, I have been asked to place these discoveries on record for the benefit of those interested locally and in the antiquarian world.

In the first of these published descriptions, by the late Mr. William Burges, A.R.A., and Mr. Albert Way, F.S.A., we have a fairly accurate and full account of the paintings, written at about the time of their discovery in 1858, when the Church underwent restoration at the hands of Mr. Burges, and with the active co-operation of the then Rector, the Rev. Thomas Burningham, M.A. It was owing to the intelligent zeal of this gentleman and his architect that, in such a very dark era as the eighteen fifties, these paintings were uncovered and preserved. Moreover, with rare restraint for that time, they were not retouched, so that to-day they stand forth as a genuine mediæval document. The description in the *Archæological Journal* was accom-

¹ Vol. XXI, p. 209.

² Vol. XI, p. 3.

panied by engravings from Mr. Way's drawings, which are extremely useful in interpreting the curious details. These engravings, however—possibly by the fault of the engraver—omit or slur over one or two important features, to which I would specially direct attention.

The descriptive account of Charlwood Church and the paintings by my late friend, Mr. J. Lewis André, F.S.A., in the *Collections* of the Surrey Archæological Society, added but little to our knowledge of the paintings, nor did Mr. André illustrate them.

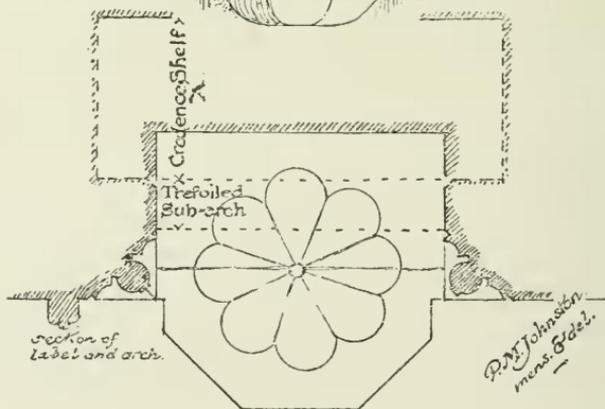
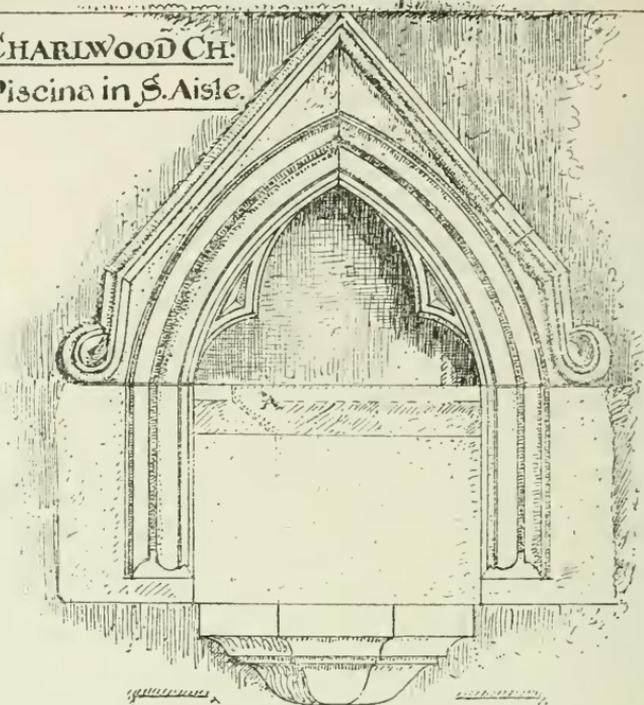
I have taken advantage of the scaffold erected for cleaning, etc., to make a full-size copy on tracing paper of the whole of the paintings, and it was in the cleaning and tracing that the curious details I have alluded to came to light.

It is necessary first to state a few facts about the Church before dealing with the paintings.

The Early Norman nave (c. 1080), with its high and massive north wall, and one original window, survives. The features of the west wall are a large window and doorway of early fifteenth-century date, which most unfortunately were entirely renewed in Bath stone a few years ago. The Chancel arch—*i.e.*, the western arch of the tower, intermediate between the Nave and Chancel—is of Early Norman date: but the eastern arch is so completely disguised with stucco that its date can only be assumed as eleventh century. If this be the case, there was originally either a short square-ended chancel or an apsidal termination beyond the tower: but all the features of the present Chancel point to its eastward extension in the first part of the fourteenth century, to which period the very beautiful traceried window inserted in the arched recess of the north wall of the Nave belongs. But before these fourteenth-century alterations, a wide aisle, with a Lady Chapel, were thrown out on the South of the Nave and Tower, and this addition was prolonged eastward to nearly the length of the Chancel, late in the fifteenth or early in the sixteenth century.

The Aisle was constructed between 1270 and 1290—to judge by the character of its windows and doorway, and the finely moulded capitals of the arcade, each of a different

CHARLWOOD CH.
Piscina in S. Aisle.



Plan.

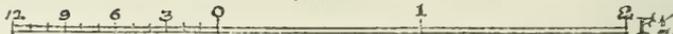


FIG. I.

section. It should be noted that the bases to the column and responds are of a fifteenth-century section, and indicate that the arcade had shown signs of failure by that date, and that it had been underpinned to avert a collapse.

The two-light window in the south wall of the aisle is a rare example of plate tracery. It is of two trefoiled pointed-arched lights, with a circle enclosing a cinquefoil over; the whole embraced within a pointed arch and moulded label externally. This label has a "mask" stop on the right and a "curled" stop on the left. The jambs and cill are of a hard local sandstone; all the rest is in the soft calcareous firestone from Reigate. Eastward of this window is a large and beautiful piscina (Fig. I.) with trefoiled head beneath a richly moulded pointed arch, enclosed by a straight-sided label, with the same curled stops as in the window. The piscina has a credence shelf and octofoiled drain, and is perhaps the most elaborate and the best designed in Surrey.

The window sits upon a string-course, of "scroll" section, which continues as a label over the south doorway and round the western end of the aisle. It is terminated at the eastern end by a circular boss of foliage. The window is remarkable internally for its very wide splays edged by a deep hollow, which is continued round the arch, surmounted by a scroll-moulded label, which has mask terminals enclosing an oval bound with a cross. The foot of the hollow, where it rests on the string course, has a pyramidal stop. Another unusual feature is the almost semicircular shape of the internal arch.

The two other windows of this thirteenth-century aisle are trefoiled lancets. The wide and simply moulded doorway retains its coeval door of ledged boards, studded with iron nails on an open frame, in a perfect state of preservation, with the original scrolled hinges, having stamped rosettes, three to each of the six-scrolled terminals.

The latch only dates from 1858, but these late thirteenth-century hinges, which are of a C-scroll and central strap form, with branched terminals, to the ends of the C and the strap, are the most remarkable examples of the period in Surrey, and are a standing illustration of the lasting qualities of charcoal-smelted iron. The oak has lasted as

well as the iron, and, save for a little patching at the foot, is still the original work, sound and perfect.¹

Of the later work in the fabric, the massively framed fifteenth-century roofs, the delicately carved screen, etc., nothing need be said here, as they have been dealt with by the above-quoted writers and in the *Victoria History of Surrey*, Vol IV.

To come to the paintings:

There were probably others, which were destroyed in the general replastering of the walls that took place in 1858. The two that remain are on the south wall of the Aisle, left and right of the two-light window, and are of the same late thirteenth-century date as the wall. The eastern of the two is entirely occupied by the legend of St. Margaret of Antioch (Plate I.); the western, of about the same area, embraces part of the story of St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, beneath which is the Morality or Allegory of the Three Dead and the Three Living, and possibly another subject to westward, which has been more or less destroyed, and over it, in the latter part of the fifteenth century, another painting was executed, of which only one figure remains—that of an archer shooting, which may have formed part of the legend of either St. Edmund, King and Martyr, shot to death with arrows by the Danes in 1016, or of St. Sebastian, who suffered the same kind of martyrdom.

The writers in the *Archæological Journal*, whom I have quoted above, allude to the resemblance between the treatment of the legend of St. Margaret here and in the illuminated MS. known as Queen Mary's Psalter, now in the British Museum. This is no chance or fancied resemblance. There is little doubt that the men who painted the walls of our ancient churches were either trained in the scriptoria of the monasteries or at any rate borrowed their ideas from the parchment illuminations that were always passing into the outer world from those centres of light and learning. Thus, a travelling painter, walking or riding round the countryside, would be hired to paint the newly plastered

¹ It should be recorded here that I have discovered and opened out an Early Norman window in the middle storey of the Tower, south wall, 3 feet high by 1 foot wide externally.



CHARLWOOD CHURCH WALL PAINTINGS.

walls of the Aisle of Charlwood Church. He would have in his wallet not only his brushes and pigments, but some scrolls of parchment or books of the Gospel stories and Lives of the Saints, in outline and colour. He would suggest appropriate subjects for the paintings, having regard to the dedication of the Church or its Chapels and the wishes of his patrons, and would sketch out or select from his sample drawings a small-scale design or picture. Having measured the wall spaces to be painted, he would proceed to enlarge so many times from his small original on to the wall itself, using a stick of charcoal, a piece of red chalk or a lead pencil. He would either do this on the smooth lime-coated plaster or on a coat of lime-white laid on the wall surface; and having roughly outlined his subjects, he would fill in with the reds, yellows, blue, green, brown umber, vegetable charcoal, pink, flesh tint and white that constituted his simple range of colours. He might, or might not, strengthen or vary his first rough outlines: and he would give greater or less finish to his pictures according as he was paid, lodged and fed, and the fancy took him.

Now for the first time, so far as I am aware, the actual method by which the painting was enlarged from the miniature has come to light in the case before us. When I had succeeded in cleaning off the surface dirt, the upright and horizontal lines of a lead pencil began to show themselves beneath the thin colouring, and applying a foot rule to these I soon discovered that vertically and horizontally these lines measured exactly one foot apart, so that connecting those that have been obliterated in the course of centuries it was evident that the whole surface had been ruled out in foot squares, and obviously for the purpose of enlarging from the small parchment original to the large painting on the wall.

Charlwood may justly be proud of possessing a feature in its church that can claim to be unique. It is true that in Ford Church, Sussex, I discovered lead pencil setting-out lines in twelfth-century wall paintings that I brought to light in 1899, but these were just guide lines in some masonry patterns: here we have a definite network of lines to show how the painter put his subjects on the walls. The reason, perhaps, why these lines have lasted at Charlwood is that

they must have been ruled upon the fresh lime plaster, not on the usual coat of limewash. One place where the lines can be distinctly seen is in the top tier of the subjects relating to St. Margaret, where the feet of the men and horse in the hunting scene rest on the horizontal pencil line, and one of the vertical lines falls from the horse's nose to the hind foot of the herald who is delivering the letter of Ollibrius the Governor to the seated figure of the Saint. Another of the vertical lines has been worked in, oddly enough, to serve as the bow-string of the fifteenth-century archer in the right-hand group of subjects.

Some of the details that stand out clearly since the cleaning are the tiny hare and the pink greyhound pursuing it in the hunting scene; the Innkeeper and his Wife, or the parents of the three boys who had been salted down in the barrel of pickled pork by the Innkeeper, and the three boys with upraised hands in the tub; with what remains of the tall figure of St. Nicholas in episcopal vestments and mitre.

In the scene of the Three Dead and the Three Living, a detail that does not even appear in the engraving published sixty-two years ago, is the hawk-on-wrist in the figures of two of the Kings. In both cases there is a glove of four fingers in one and a thumb.

It may be worth while here to record that there is a painting of this subject, of about the same late thirteenth-century date, in the north aisle of Hurstbourne Tarrant Church, in which the three yellow skeletons and the figures of the Kings bear so close a resemblance that it is not improbable the same artist executed both paintings. It should also be stated that these two examples, with the slightly later one in the north aisle of Lutterworth Church, Leicestershire, which I preserved and copied in 1914, are the oldest remaining of this subject in England. At Lutterworth the hawk-on-wrist detail also appears.

Wall-plate.



P. M. Johnston
del.

CHARLWOOD CHURCH.

PART OF THE LEGEND OF ST. MARGARET OF ANTIOCH: ON S. WALL OF AISLE.
Showing pencil setting out lines, in 1 ft squares.