The Creation, . . . Marginalia and Ornament in the Refectory Paintings of Bushmead Priory

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The refectory is the only substantial part of the Augustinian priory of Bushmead (TL115607) to survive. Placed in the care of the Department of the Environment in 1973, it underwent extensive conservation work prior to its being opened to the public by the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission in 1985. This conservation programme has led to a reassessment of the architectural history of the building, which will be treated in detail in an article in a future issue of this Journal.1 Although some medieval painting was already known on the west wall (Plate 2a), during the removal of later lavers of unstable plaster and limewash further painting came to light on this and the other three walls, all clearly forming part of a single scheme datable to about 1310, and which has likewise now received conservation treatment.² The painting which has been revealed is of importance not only because it is unusual for the painted decoration of refectories to survive, but also because it includes rare scenes of the Creation, including one or perhaps two which are apparently unparalleled in wall painting elsewhere in England.

The refectory is a large rectangular hall (approximately 21 m x 7.5 m). Originally open to the roof, it was divided by the insertion of a first floor c.1500, and by partition walls in the post-Dissolution period. There is no documentation for the chronology of the different phases of the building; dating must therefore be based on stylistic evidence. Although the priory was founded c.1195.3 the earliest phase of the refectory appears to date from c.1250. This includes the cinquefoil arch of the lavatorium in the south wall, part of the (blocked) south doorway, the lower jambs and inner arch of the great west window, and the magnificent crownpost roof.4 In c.1310 various alterations were made, and it was at this time that the extant painted decoration was carried out. The sill and window head were taken out of the west window and new tracery inserted within the same opening (only stumps of this tracery now survive). A window was inserted in the north wall, towards the east end; it is of three lights, with a shallow internal arch on nookshafted jambs. All the early fourteenth-century

alterations are in clunch, in contrast to the Barnack stone used for the earlier work. The substantial alterations made c.1500 included not only the construction of the first floor, and the addition of windows in the north and south walls, but also the blocking of the great west window and the insertion within it of a smaller window with Perpendicular tracery (Plate 2a). The west window is now filled with modern timber tracery, which allows the painting previously concealed by the blocking to be seen. After the Dissolution, large first-floor windows were created and the interior sub-divided for domestic use, and various other alterations were made at later dates.

Enough survives of the wall painting to allow a partial reconstruction of the overall scheme. One of the main elements is masonry pattern - a very common form of medieval decoration, consisting of horizontal and vertical lining imitating the joints between blocks of ashlar. This pattern seems to have covered the greater part of all the walls (with the possible exception of the east wall, much of which may have been occupied by a large figuresubject), and the window splays as well. A great deal of this decoration remains on the west wall surrounding the window, and on the head and splays of the window itself (Plates 2b and 8). There is also a large area above and to the east of the early fourteenth-century window in the north wall (Plate 3a), and smaller areas on the south and east walls. All the masonry pattern is of the same type, consisting of single red horizontal lines and double vertical lines, the left-hand line being thinner and fainter than the other. The blocks formed by the lines are enriched by five-petalled flowers (about 5.5 cm in diameter), clearly executed with a stencil.5 These rosettes were originally vermilion, but most have now turned grey-black. At the base of the masonry pattern on the north wall is a horizontal border comprising a wide red band (c.13 cm) above a narrow red line. This is c.240 cm above the present floor level and presumably continued around the interior;6 on the west wall it would have been approximately at the height of the window sill. The plaster below the level of the surviving length of border is unpainted,

and this may have been the case throughout the refectory; possibly the lower part of the walls was covered with wainscotting or textile hangings. On the east and west walls, running beneath the gable rafters, is a band of red vine-scroll, bordered on either side by black lines. There are now only fragments of this border on the east wall, at the very top, but it survives much better on the west wall (Plate 2b). The scrollwork emerges, on the south side of the west wall, from the beak of a beautifully drawn crane-like bird (Plate 4a); in the corresponding position on the north side is a damaged, but still recognisable male figure, hooded and with his face in profile (Plate 4b).

The painted decoration of the west window itself is quite elaborate, comprising an outer and inner order, with the intervening area of the window embrasure covered in masonry pattern. The outer order - inserted c.1310 - is decorated on the interior face of the arch with a bent-riband pattern enriched with trefoil leaves painted in red, vellow and black (Plate 3b). The inner order has feigned supports for the inner arch of the window, in the form of columns painted at the edge of the jambs. The long, slender shafts are painted to imitate a 'marble' such as Purbeck, with black, comma-like strokes (resembling fossil shells) on a grey ground. The capital of each column (Plate 8a), painted in black against the plain plaster ground, is formed of stylised leaves with serrated edges and each has a prominent necking and abacus. Springing from these capitals is the inner arch decorated on its narrow soffit with white foliate scrollwork on a black ground (Plate 8b), and on its chamfer and main face with red banding bordered by double black lines.7

At the top of the walls, running below the wallplate, was a border composed of lozenge-shaped frames ($c.30 \text{ cm} \times 41.5 \text{ cm}$) containing small scenes (the subject-matter of the surviving scenes will be discussed below) with foliate ornament between them, and bordered above and below by a narrow strip of wave pattern (c.5.2 cm wide). Although this border can now best be seen at the eastern end of the north wall (Plate 3a), it also partially survives on the west wall (it was less faint when photographed in 1958; see Plate 2a), where it terminates at the level of the capital of the inner order of the window. Presumably, then, this border continued along the length of the north, west and south (and possibly east) walls, interrupted only by the west window.

To summarise, the painted decoration of the north and south walls would have consisted of enriched masonry pattern bounded below by a red dado border and above by a lozenge border enclosing narrative scenes running below the wall-plate. The gable ends of the east and west walls were decorated with a scrollwork border with the remaining wall surface covered by masonry pattern (or possibly a large figure-subject on the east wall). The focus of the surviving painted decoration is the west window with its inner and outer orders articulated in paint and with the capitals and bases of the fictive columns of the inner order coinciding respectively with the termination of the lozenge border and the dado band. The colours used are red and yellow ochre, vermilion, white and black. Red is certainly the predominant colour, in both the decoration and the figure-scenes.

It is reasonable to assume that the architectural alterations of c.1310 and the painting date from the same phase of work on the refectory. It is evident from their interrelation that the painting cannot predate the architectural alterations: on the west window, the riband border is actually painted on the outer order inserted at this time, when the window was filled with Decorated tracery; on the north wall, the painting was obviously executed after the eastern window was inserted, with the figural border running immediately above it, and the dado border carrying over onto its jamb. Further, the style of the painted decoration itself indicates a dating in about the first third of the fourteenth century. The vinescroll borders along the gables of the east and west walls (Plates 4a-b), with their relatively naturalistic leaves and tendrils, can be compared quite closely to the scrollwork in the Gough Psalter, of about the beginning of the fourteenth century.8 The bird and man at the bases of the west wall border are strongly reminiscent of the marginalia of contemporary manuscripts. For example, the Beatus page of the Peterborough Psalter (of about the end of the thirteenth century) has various birds including a crane in the foliate border, as well as figures of peasants and others, several of whom are hooded (Plate 5a).9 The Bushmead bird cannot be identified as any particular species, and in this respect is similar to a bird in the celebrated wall paintings of Longthorpe Tower (Cambs.) of c.1330-40, which likewise appears at the foot of an area of foliate scrollwork.¹⁰ The hooded figure in the Bushmead paintings can be compared not only with those in the Peterborough Psalter, but also with the crouching man supporting the foliate border of a page in the Ormesby Psalter (c.1300-25) where – although the figure is shown in three-quarter face - his hood is similarly represented on the back of his head,

revealing the curly hair above the forehead (Plate 5b).¹¹

The west window decoration and also the masonry pattern support a dating in this period. Although the best surviving parallel to the columns painted at the edge of the jambs is provided by the thirteenth-century painting on a window at Bishop's Cleeve (Glos.),12 columns similarly placed support canopies over figures in the mid fourteenth-century paintings at Chalgrove (Oxon).13 The fictive marbling of the column shafts at Bushmead is paralleled in both thirteenth- and fourteenth-century painting. for example, on the screen on the south side of the choir of Lincoln Cathedral (c.1310).14 The highly stylised foliage of the capitals (Plate 8a) strongly suggests a dating in the first third of the fourteenth century rather than in the preceding century. The long serrated leaves can be seen as a half-way stage between the exaggeratedly long oak leaves which appear in such manuscripts as the Peterborough Psalter (Plate 5a), and the more stylised 'cabbage leaf foliage seen in initials and borders in this manuscript and also, for example, in the Ormesby Psalter. On the other hand, it does not have the fleshy, undulating appearance of such foliage of the second quarter of the fourteenth century as that carved in the spandrels of the Thornham Parva retable, or represented on capitals in the wall paintings of South Newington (Oxon).15 The bentriband border on the outer order, though rather archaic in appearance, was very closely paralleled in the wall paintings of Wendens Ambo (Essex) of c.1330.16 The elaborated masonry pattern with double vertical lines and rosettes which do not have the indented petals characteristic of such later paintings as Chalgrove (c.1350),¹⁷ is also entirely typical of decoration of the first third of the fourteenth century. The scenes in the lozenge border, in their arrangement and small size, are again very reminiscent of early fourteenth-century manuscript illumination. Thus, in the border encircling the Beatus page of the Gorleston Psalter (c.1310-20), small Nativity scenes and seated figures are contained within oval frames.18 Similarly, in the border of the Beatus page of the St Omer Psalter (c.1330-40), Creation scenes and other Old Testament subjects are enclosed in approximately circular frames (Plate 6b).19

Although they are very damaged, close examination of the scenes on the north wall at Bushmead reveals that Creation subjects are represented here too. This is of great interest since Old Testament scenes of any sort are comparatively rare in sur-

viving English medieval wall paintings, and there appear to be only two other examples with Creation subject-matter. The first of these is the impressive scheme of paintings, attributed to travelling English artists working c.1200, in the chapter house of the nunnery of Sigena in northern Spain. These paintings were badly damaged by fire in 1936, and the remnants are now in the Museo de Arte de Cataluña, Barcelona.20 Two Creation subjects are included in the Sigena Old Testament cycle: the Creation of Adam, and the Creation of Eve.21 In the wall paintings of c.1300 in the chancel of Easby church (N. Yorks), which unfortunately were heavily repainted in the Victorian period, Adam and Eve subjects are represented on the north wall. including the Creation of Eve.22

The westernmost surviving scene in the Bushmead border is a standard representation of the Creation of Eve (Plate 6a). The figure of Eve is shown emerging from Adam, who is represented reclining and supporting his head with his right hand. Eve faces towards the right, and has both arms raised together; she is held by the wrist(s) by God, represented further to the right, with his left hand raised in blessing. This depiction of the subject is closely paralleled in both the Sigena and Easby wall paintings (Plate 6c), as well as in many manuscript representations, such as that in the St Omer Psalter (Plate 6b). The lozenge immediately to the east of the Creation of Eve in the Bushmead border contains only a single figure (Plate 7a), whose identification will be considered below. The next scene to the east (Plate 7b) shows a reclining figure, of rather manikin-like appearance, its head a simple oval without facial features or even hair, and its arms hanging limply. Above this figure are the remains of another leaning over it. In view of its close proximity to the Creation of Eve, this subject can clearly be identified as the Creation of Adam, with Adam typically represented lying at the foot of the scene. A similarly composed representation can be seen in the west front sculpture of Wells Cathedral (second quarter thirteenth century), where however Adam lies diagonally on the lumpy ground from which he has been created (Plate 7c).23 In the Bushmead scene. Adam appears to be depicted only incompletely formed, which is very unusual, though in the twelfth-century Lambeth Bible God is actually shown fashioning him with his hands.24 The object God holds in his left hand and which touches the shoulder of Adam is difficult to explain, but given the lifeless pose of Adam is unlikely to be the rib for the later Creation of Eve.

The figure in the lozenge between these two scenes (Plate 7a) is represented on a larger scale; it is a recumbent, clothed male figure, with his head inclined towards the east, and apparently bearded and with long hair. Because the figure is clothed, it cannot be a representation of Adam. The subject can almost certainly be identified as God Resting on the Seventh Day, which in other Creation cycles is occasionally represented as here between the Creation of Adam and the Creation of Eve, and which would account for the reclining pose of the figure in the painting. In the twelfth-century mosaics of Monreale Cathedral and the Cappella Palatina at Palermo, God is shown enthroned between the same two Creation subjects.²⁵ Logically, of course, the subject of God resting should occur after the Creation of Eve. However, Eve's creation is described twice in Genesis: once in the general account of the Creation which ends with God resting on the seventh day (Genesis 1:1-31 and 2:1-3); and then again in the account of how God provided man with a helper (Genesis 2:18-25). It is probably this which accounts for the occasional representation of God resting between the Creation of Adam and the Creation of Eve.

To the east of the Creation of Adam are fragments of further lozenges, though the remains are much too slight for any subjects to be identified. However, because the narrative of the surviving subjects runs from east to west, it is likely that these contained earlier Creation scenes. No remains of subjects can now be seen within the lozenges faintly visible in the border on the west wall, but since it can be presumed that this border continued along the whole of the north, west and south walls, there is every possibility that an exceptionally long cycle of scenes existed in this scheme at Bushmead. The width of the lozenges is consistently c.41.5 cm where verifiable on the north wall; this would allow for another six scenes between the Creation of Adam and the east wall, and a total of approximately 106 on the north, west and south walls! It is, though, quite possible that some of the lozenges were empty, or contained only single figures (like some of those in the Gorleston Psalter).

This narrative scheme in a refectory is without surviving parallels. The figure-subjects which occur in the few other known English refectory paintings tend to have a more obvious appropriateness to their location. Thus, the Last Supper was represented on the east wall of the refectory of the Augustinian priory of Ivychurch (Wilts),²⁶ and a fine twelfth-century rendering of the same subject

survives in this position in the Benedictine priory at Dover.27 Another representation of the Last Supper existed in the early thirteenth-century paintings on the east wall of the refectory of Eastbridge Hospital, Canterbury, beneath a Majesty and other subjects.28 The Crucifixion - with its obvious Eucharistic significance - occurs in the paintings of the refectory east wall of the Benedictine priory of Horsham St Faith (Norfolk), of c.1250-60;29 another representation is recorded on the west wall of the refectory of Durham Cathedral Priory,30 and a late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century example was formerly visible on the refectory east wall in the Cistercian abbey of Cleeve (Somerset).31 Running beneath the Crucifixion at Horsham St Faith is a strip of scenes illustrating the miraculous circumstances of that priory's foundation, and it seems that representations of founders and patrons (including patron saints) were also characteristic of refectory decoration.32

The Creation subjects represented at Bushmead, if originally forming part of an overall cycle, would themselves have been far from inappropriate to a refectory. Genesis tells how God gave man dominion over all other living things, and 'every plant yielding seed ... and every tree with seed in its fruit' for his food (Genesis 1:28-29). Subjects from the Fall may also have been shown in the paintings, with Adam and Eve eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and with Adam labouring for food after the expulsion. Even though the scenes at Bushmead are small and at a considerable distance above floor level, this does not necessarily imply that their subject-matter would not have been carefully chosen; the biblical scenes on the west front of Wells Cathedral are also small and quite high up,33 and even the subjects of roof-bosses - as in the Lady Chapel of Ely Cathedral (completed c.1353), where they include scenes of the Virgin could be quite deliberately chosen.34

In most of the other refectory paintings noted above, the subject-matter is concentrated – as might be expected – on the east wall, behind the dais. Thus, at Horsham St Faith the Crucifixion and foundation scenes are represented in this position, while on the other original surviving wall the remains consist only of masonry pattern and other decorative painting. On the east wall at Bushmead, the only painting which survives is a fragment of the gable border and of masonry pattern at the top of the wall. It is an intriguing possibility that a large figure-subject may have been represented lower down this wall – perhaps the Crucifixion or Last Supper. If the Temptation was among the further scenes originally represented in the lozenge border, a representation of the Crucifixion would have been particularly appropriate on the east wall, the tree of the cross redeeming the Fall of Man occasioned by the eating of the fruit in the Garden of Eden. A Crucifixion painted on the wall above the dais would have formed a fitting and powerful climax to the overall scheme of the refectory.35

NOTES

- 1 John Bailey and David Sherlock, 'Bushmead Priory, the Conservation of a 13th-century Hall and Roof, Bedfordshire Archaeology, forthcoming. See also the guide by David Sherlock, Bushmead Priory, Bedfordshire (1985). I am very grateful to Mr Sherlock, Inspector of Ancient Monuments in charge of the conservation programme, for help in the preparation of the present article, and for allowing me to use his researches on the building. Ms Sharon Cather has kindly read the whole article, and made many useful suggestions. For assistance of various kinds I would also like to thank Dr Paul Binski, Miss Anne Godfrey, and Dr Christopher Norton.
- 2 The decorative border at the top of the west wall is briefly and somewhat inaccurately recorded by Tristram, who dated it to c.1300; E.W. Tristram, English Medieval Wall Painting: The Thirteenth Century (1950), 345, 518. Some of the painting on this wall is also described by N.W. Alcock, 'Bushmead Priory, Bedfordshire: a Thirteenth-Century Hall and Roof', Jnl Brit Arch Assoc, 3rd ser, 33 (1970), 52-3, 55, where it is assigned to the late 13th century. For useful information on the scheme as a whole I am indebted to Mrs Krystyna Barakan, the conservator of the paintings for the Dept of the Environment. All the painting has now been recorded for the National Survey of Medieval Wall Paintings, which is being undertaken by the present author on behalf of the Courtauld Institute of Art, with funding from the Leverhulme Trust, and in collaboration with the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England). I would like to thank Mr Leonard Furbank who took most of the RCHM photographs illustrating this article.
- For the history of the priory, see VCH Bedfordshire, I (1904), 385-7, 3 III (1912), 197-8; and G. Fowler and J. Godber (eds), 'The Cartulary of Bushmead Priory' (Beds Hist Rec Soc 22), 1945.
- All the datings of the building itself in this article are those of Mr Sherlock; the roof was regarded as late 13th-century by Alcock, op cit, 53-4.
- A lead stencil for painting such rosettes has been found on the site of the Cistercian abbey of Meaux (Humberside); see D. Park. 'Cistercian Wall Painting and Panel Painting', in Cistercian Art and Architecture in the British Isles, ed C. Norton and D. Park (forthcoming).
- The existing floor is 19th-century, and slightly lower than the original.
- 7 Some of the red banding, as well as some of the decoration on the inner order and the masonry pattern on the west wall, has now been restored in the tratteggio technique (ie with short, hatched strokes).
- Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Gough liturg 8; see L.F. Sandler, The Peterborough Psalter in Brussels and Other Fenland Manuscripts (1974), figs 90, 95, etc. According to Sandler, 10, this Psalter dates from after 1292, but possibly before 1304.
- 0 Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale MS 9961-62, fol 14; Sandler, op cit. fig 296. Sandler, 9, attributes this manuscript to the period c.1299-1317; but A. Bennett, in her review of Sandler (Art Bulletin 64 (1982), 508, suggests a late 13th-century date.
- E.C. Rouse and A. Baker, 'The Wall-Paintings at Longthorpe Tower, near Peterborough, Northants', Archaeologia 96 (1945), pls 10 II, IIIa
- 11 Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 366, fol 147v. In painting on an arch in Christchurch Priory (Dorset), foliate scrollwork is shown emerging from a grotesque hooded head; this painting is dated by Tristram to the 13th century; see Tristram op cit, 201-2, 527, supp pl 22c
- 12 Ibid, 506, supp pl 29f.

- 13 E.W. Tristram, English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century (1955), pl 30.
- 14 D. Park, 'The Medieval Painted Decoration of Lincoln Cathedral', Medieval Art and Architecture at Lincoln Cathedral (British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions for the year 1982, 7), forthcoming.
- 15 For the retable, see M. Rickert, Painting in Britain: The Middle Ages, 2nd ed (1965), pl 144; and for South Newington, Tristram, op cit, pl 16a. A dating in the late 1330s or c.1340 is argued for these works in P. Binski, C. Norton and D. Park, A Dominican Altar Reconstructed: The Thornham Parva Retable and Musée de Cluny Frontal (forthcoming).
- Tristram, op cit, 261, pl 49.
- Ibid, pls 30, 38, etc. 17
- 18 London, British Library MS. Add 49622, fol 8; Rickert, op cit, pl 131
- 19 London, British Library MS. Yates Thompson 14, fol 7
- See O. Pächt, 'A Cycle of English Frescoes in Spain', Burlington 20 Magazine 103 (1961), 166-75; and W. Oakeshott, Romanesque Painting in Spain and the Winchester Bible Artists (1972).
- Ibid, ills 10 and 11.
- 22 Tristram, Thirteenth Century, 375, 539. See also T. Owen, The Wall-Paintings of Easby Church, North Yorkshire, unpubl MA dissertation, York University (1980), 16-21, 35-9.
- 73 This is the first of a series of forty-nine Old and New Testament scenes running above the lowest tier of canopies on the west front. For the scene of the Creation of Eve, which is very similar to that at Bushmead, see P. Tudor-Craig, One Half of our Noblest Art: A Study of the Sculptures of Wells West Front (1976), ills 19, 20. Each of the Wells scenes is enclosed in a guatrefoil frame, and in their fairly small scale, and representation quite high up in relation to the viewer, are generally reminiscent of the Bushmead border. For the series as a whole, see W.H. St John Hope and W.R. Lethaby, 'The Imagery and Sculptures on the West Front of Wells Cathedral', Archaeologia 59 (1905).
- London, Lambeth Palace MS 3, fol 6v; C.R. Dodwell, The Canterbury School of Illumination 1066-1200 (1954), pl 50a.
- O. Demus, The Mosaics of Norman Sicily (1949), p195A (Monreale), and pl 27B (Palermo). A more elaborate representation of God Resting occurs between the Creation of Adam and Creation of Eve in the 12th-century mosaics of San Marco, Venice; see R.B. Green, 'The Adam and Eve Cycle in the Hortus Deliciarum', in K. Weitzmann (ed), Late Classical and Mediaeval Studies in Honor of Albert Mathias Friend, Jr (1955), pl LV.
- Tristram, Thirteenth Century, 223, 360. Tristram, 233, also 26 mentions a figure of St Peter and another saint (St Paul?)
- E.W. Tristram, English Medieval Wall Painting: The Twelfth Century (1944), 24-5, 120, pl 27a. Tristram, *Thirteenth Century*, 274-5, 520-1, supp pl 49. *Ibid*, 360-1, 554, pls 205-7; D. Purcell, 'The Priory of Horsham St
- 29 Faith and its Wallpaintings', Norfolk Archaeology 35(1974), 470, pl 1.
- C.E. Keyser, List of Buildings Having Mural Decorations, 3rd ed 30 1883), 90. Victoria History of the Counties of England, Durham III (1928), 127. On the east wall of this refectory a very damaged, and unidentified 12th-century figure-subject was uncovered in the 1960s; see M. Johnson, 'Recent Work on the Refectory of Durham Cathedral', Transactions of the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland, new ser, 1 (1968), 86-7.
- See M.R. James, Abbeys (1926), 125, pl facing p 127, and D. Park, 31 Cistercian Wall Painting and Panel Painting' (forthcoming). For an interesting discussion of the reasons for depicting the Last Supper and the Crucifixion in refectories, concentrating on examples in Italian Renaissance wall painting, see C. Gilbert 'Last Suppers and their Refectories', in C. Trinkhaus and H. Oberman (eds), The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion (1974), 371-407. At Denny Abbey (Cambs), the (unpublished) remains of 14th-century decorative painting in the refectory included birds (cf that on the west wall at Bushmead).
- 32 For the Horsham St Faith scenes, see Purcell, op cit, 470-2, pl 1. Cf also the wall paintings in the refectory of the abbey of Cluny, given by Roger of Montgomery, Earl of Shewsbury (d.1093), which included representations of the founders, benefactors, and abbots; see J. Evans, Cluniac Art of the Romanesque Period (1950), 20. 33
- See above, note 23.
- See C.J.P. Cave, 'The Roof Bosses of Ely Cathedral', Procs of the 34 Cambridge Antiquarian Soc, 32 (1932).
- 35 Paper submitted July 1985.

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